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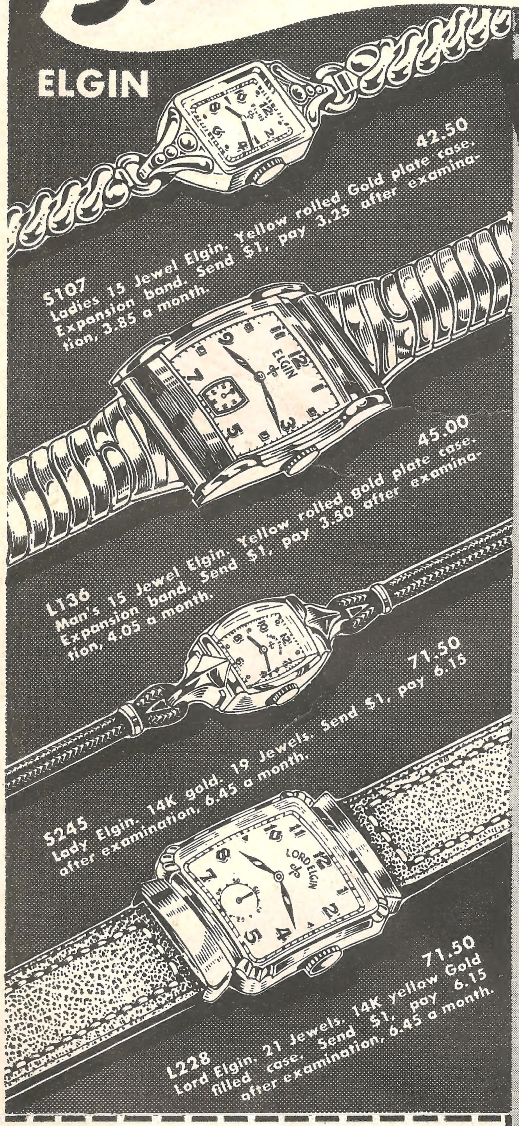

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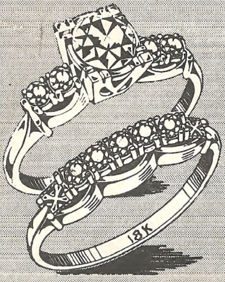

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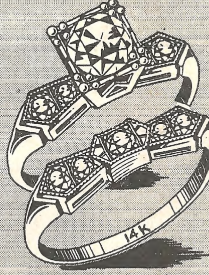

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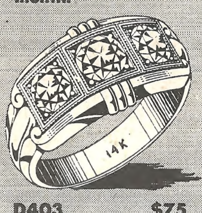

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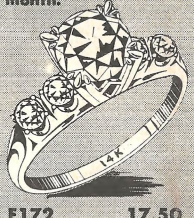

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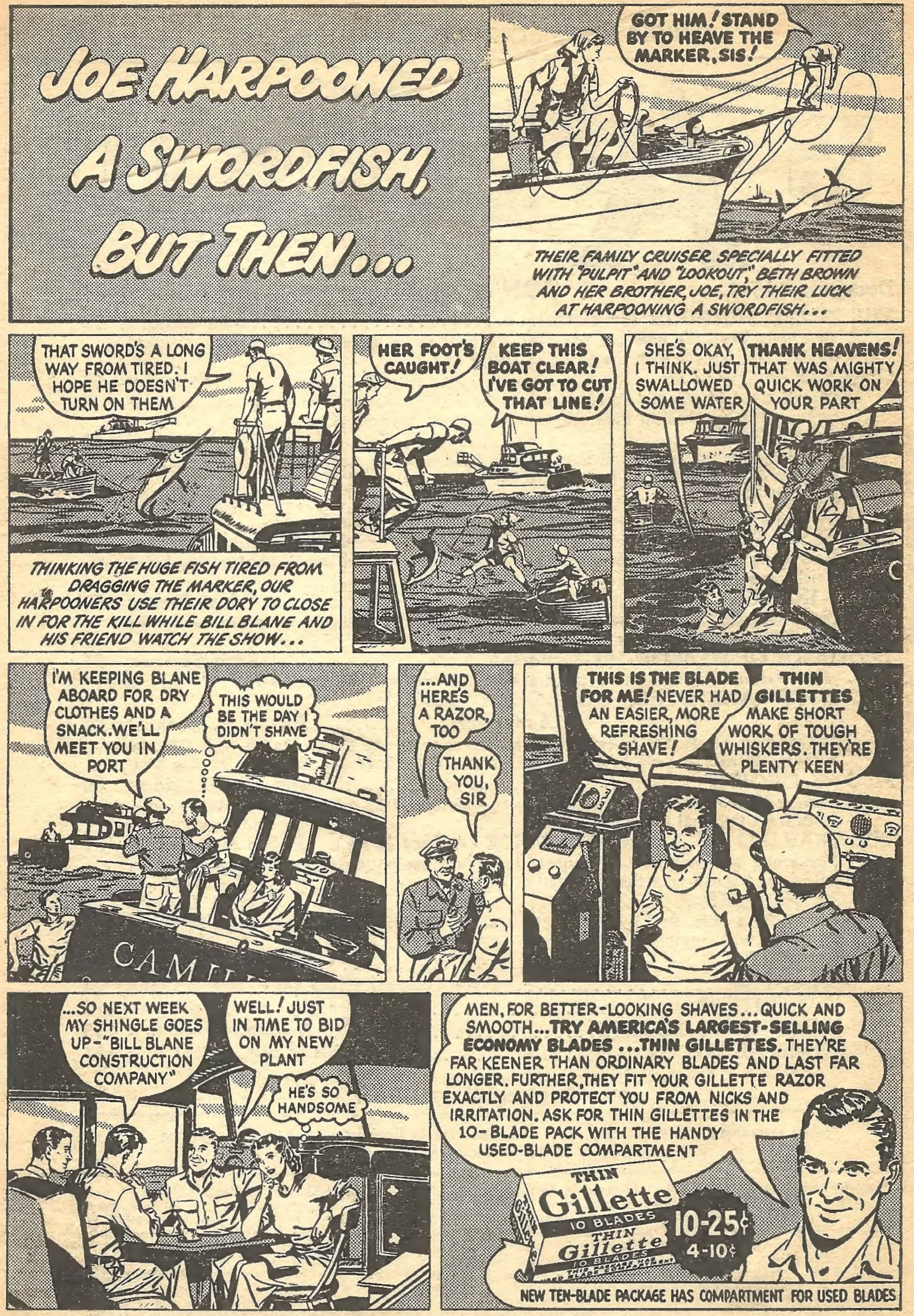
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Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

December, 1949

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Cover painted for Adventure by Hubert Rogers
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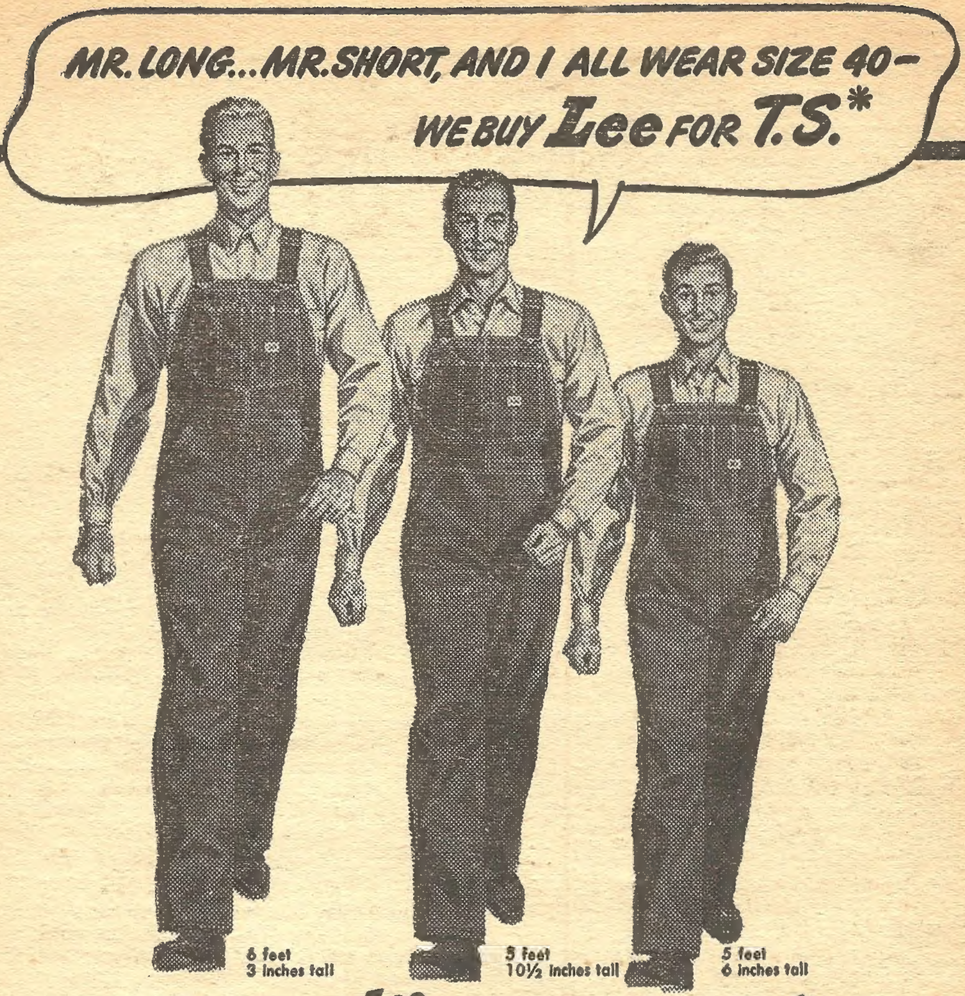
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Would appreciate hearing from anyone knowing the whereabouts of Walter Coppinger, stationed in Panama around the time of the first World War. He was discharged from the Army at Fort Benning, Ga. Please notify James Corrigan, 1225 Bloomfield St., Hoboken, N. J.

Sister and nephew of Melvin P. Verschneider would like to hear from anyone knowing his present address. He has not been heard from in five years. He is 53 years old, an expert auto mechanic and his last known address was 21 Evergreen St., Cortland, N. Y. Send information to nephew, Harry Farrar, c/o D. Pitale, 32 So. Conn. Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.

Would like information concerning whereabouts of Floyd (Bud) Riggs. Ex-sailor and race car jockey. Lived at Wilmar and Los Angeles, California. We were shipmates on USS *Leonis* in South Pacific '43 and '44. Maybe shipping Merchant Marine or tending bar around California coast. Send any information to Richard Powell, Cpl., USA, Alaskan Communication System, Box 219, Anchorage, Alaska.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Hugh Parker: height 6' 3", aged about 65. Great horseman; last heard of was working in the oil fields. Former home was Tidioute, Penna. Please contact his son, Cyril L. Parker, 1317 Pearl St., Franklin, Penna.

Would like information of Army buddies' whereabouts: John Kowal, Hamtramck, Mich.; Harry Gottfried, Chicago; John Tyson, N. Y. C. All of the 31st MRU (ETO) last seen in Chantilly. Also Emil de Roseby, 29th Inf. Div., last seen near Frankfurt A/M. Write to John F. Laughlin, 4719 N. Cicero Ave., Chicago 30, Ill.

Anyone having information about my son Robert Saffell, formerly USN, last heard from in Boise, Idaho please contact Charles Saffell, Dillonvale, Ohio, Box 161.

(Continued on page 125)

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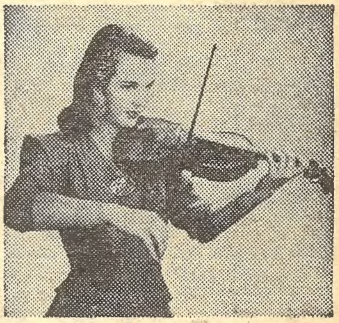

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THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

QUITE a heterogeneous gathering (if that's what we mean) around the *Camp-Fire* this month. In addition to several regular contributors with whose names you are probably familiar, you'll find a country doctor from Way Down East, a couple of newspapermen, an explorer and honorary Indian chief, a London Trinity House Pilot who practices his profession in the treacherous waters of Dover Strait . . . men of diversified backgrounds indeed, but all possessing the priceless gift of setting down one little word after another in such a way that it adds up to a highly entertaining yarn. And we might add here the name of a very fine artist who hails from Vermont—Hubert Rogers, who painted the fearsome, formidable and literally armed-to-the-teeth pirate adorning this month's cover. Older readers of this magazine will remember the many striking *Adventure* covers Mr. Rogers did some years ago. This is his first in a long time, but we hope to persuade him to tackle others in the near future.

That cover, by the way, was inspired by Charles H. Knickerbocker's fact story on the amazing career of the pirate Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard—which brings us back to the country doctor mentioned above. Dr. Knickerbocker writes from Bar Harbor in the good old State of Maine—

> I am a country doctor, of the old school though young in years. The life of a semi-rural medico contains a good bit of adventure, but it is the undramatic, uncolorful type of adventure. To break the monotony of daily contact with life and death—babies, pneumonia, heart attacks, insanity, appendicitis, poliomyelitis, cancer, tuberculosis, suicide, and all the other little things that can happen to ordinary people—I divert

(Continued on page 118)

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THE KILLER BRAND

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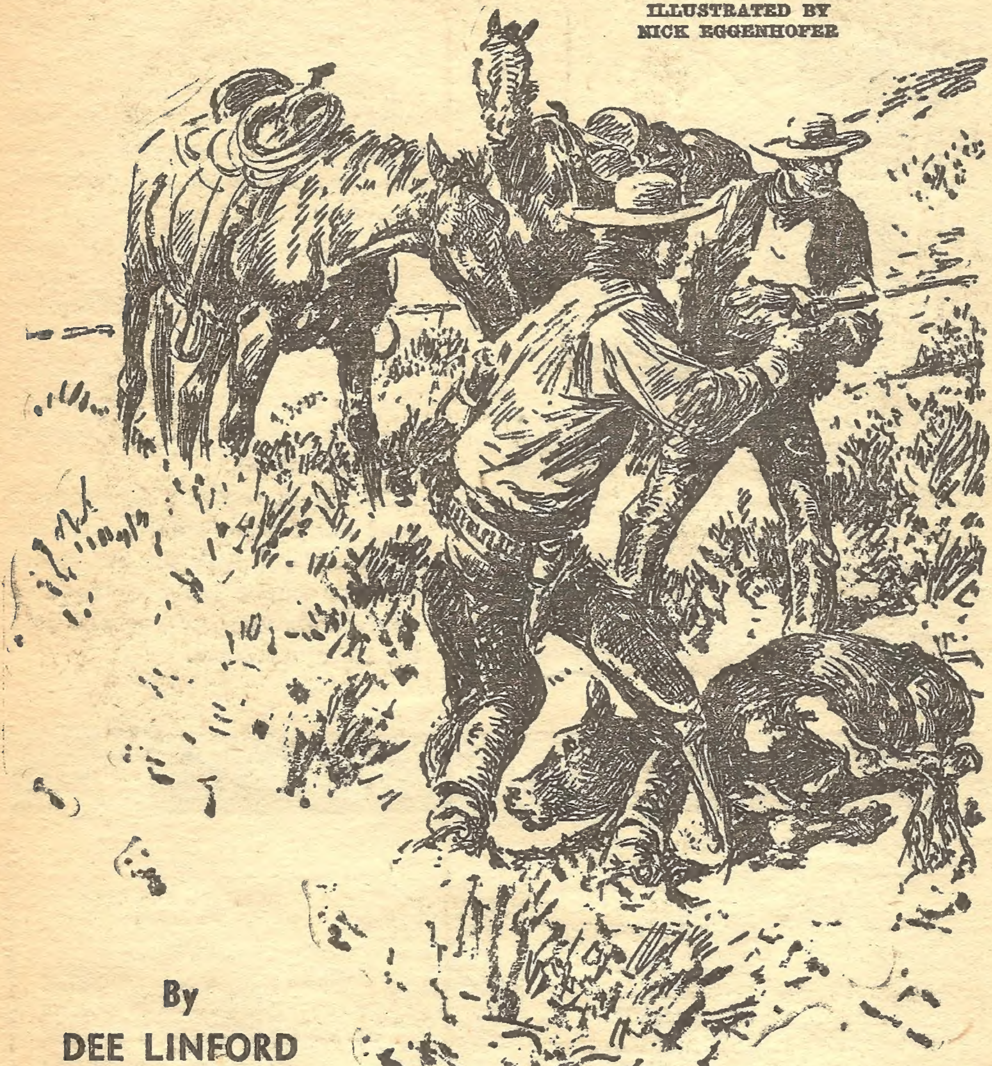


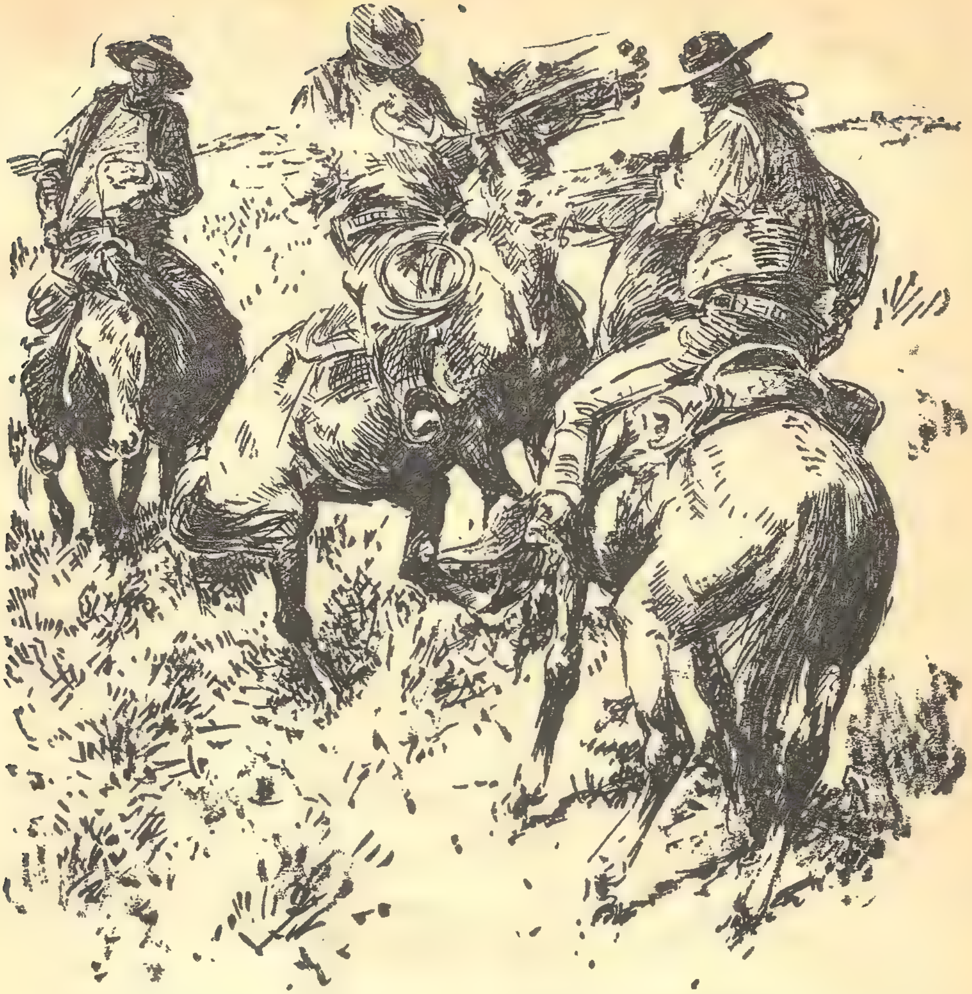
By

DEE LINFORD

LONNY BEAL looked at himself in the spotty bar mirror and grinned in sheer exuberance. For the town was Ogallala-on-the-Platte, the north fag end of the Texas Trail. Fort Stockton and the Pecos were fifteen hundred miles away, and Lonny had come all the way up, with a Picador herd. The Picador men were all around him, now. And the name of the house was the Trail's End Bar.

"It's a satisfaction to be in town again," Cranky Crowe, Picador trail cook, stated charitably. "Even if it ain't a Texas town."

Lonny didn't bother to answer aloud. But the thin, hairless face that grinned at him from the mirror nodded in benediction. After five months' nighthawking for



Threatened by a three-way crossfire, Lonny's trained reflexes sustained him—his first shot knocked the Hoe foreman out of the saddle.

the toughest wagonboss and crankiest cook on the Trail, any old town was a town . . .

The thought was still in Lonny's head when a voice yelled "Duck!" Lonny did so, automatically, and a bottle came looping out of nowhere, smashing itself on the wall behind him, spraying him with glass and liquor.

"I am a Platte River roarer," a muscular voice stated, somewhere beyond the golden sphere of warmth and good fellowship that enveloped Lonny. "This here is my time to howl."

The bristling proclamation seemed to come from the far end of the counter, down where a crowd of up-country cowhands had been wassailing noisily for some time. Lonny had paid them scant attention, even though their boisterous merriment was in marked contrast to the quietly festive manner of the dehydrated Texans. But now he turned to look in their direction, and felt the hair stiffen along his neck.

A dish-faced man in range garb had stepped out of the other crowd. He had pushed halfway across the stretch of No Man's Land that separated the two groups, and was standing on wide-placed feet, swaying slightly, an unmistakable challenge in his eyes.

THE man was considerably older than Lonny, and smaller, with an oversize head and hands like a woman's. Everything else being equal, he would have made about one bite for a man from Texas. The trouble was, everything else wasn't equal. The up-country brawler was wearing two guns, in holsters which were slung low and tied to his bowed legs. And there wasn't a gun in the whole Picador crew.

The sign at the edge of town had said: *Entering Ogallala. Indians and Texans Forbidden to Carry Firearms in City.* Big Link Bisbee, Picador trail boss, had been to Ogallala once before, and he'd insisted that his riders all leave their hardware with their horses at the livery corral. The Ogallala law, Big Link had said, was almighty hard on Texans, if you gave it an opening.

Now the dish-faced brawler was working up to a gunplay, and the nearest gun to the Texans was the barkeep's shotgun, the stock of which protruded from a shelf behind the counter.

"You smell like Longhorns," Dish Face was saying pleasantly, apparently feeling that his manifesto needed clarifying. "I don't like Texans."

Lonny stood where the L-shaped counter made its turn along the wall. Four Picadorians stood between him and the heckler. But nobody was speaking up for Texas, and Lonny was mortified.

"Leave it alone, Lonny," Cranky Crowe advised sharply, watching the nighthawk's face in the mirror. "We didn't ask the up-country son to like us. The law in this gut of a place don't like us neither. And I don't aim to die o' dry rot, in ary up-country jail, just to oblige that gunslinger."

But Lonny couldn't leave it alone. Lonny's eyes had crossed with those of the challenger, and he was feeling himself pulled out front. Besides, Lonny was seventeen, and he'd made his trip up the Trail, which meant he had come of age.

"Down on the Pecos," he remarked with what impressed him as mature observation, "that roar you're so proud of would pass for a small-sized belly growl."

The other's eyes lighted up with something like genial good humor. It was about the same as if Lonny had done him a personal good turn by his speaking up.

"Slick-eared dogies from Texas caused a Wyomin' war, once," the brawler said, his eyes and voice still genial. "They don't want nothin' like that, here in Nebraskee."

As he spoke, he drew his pistols—his actions stylish and unhurried, like a medicine show joker strutting his stuff.

"Drop down outa sight, you blinkin' fool!" Cranky whispered under his breath. "Mebbe Link can git you out o' this."

But Lonny didn't believe that Dish Face meant to use his guns. Not on a man who wasn't heeled. Even if he'd thought so, he couldn't have got down. When you're seventeen and have come up the Trail, you don't play dead for anyone. Not with your whole outfit looking on, and you proud as pride to be part of it.

"Then put up your pop-guns," Lonny said, his voice big enough, but still careful not to take his hands from on top of the bar. "Or wait while I go fetch mine."

But the good-natured up-country cowhand seemed not to hear. "I don't like Longhorn mavericks," he fretted, frowning while he continued to smile. "They pester me no end."

Still talking, he brought his guns up, with a grandstand flourish, first one and then the other, loosing a single shot from each. Lonny saw smoke belch from the small black muzzles, and heard an angry bee-like snarl in the air. The bees stung each ear sharply, down on the lobe, burning as they buzzed past.

"That," the dish-faced gunman said in the silence that followed the shots, "is called the Platte River undercut. You b'long to Nebraska now."

Lonny heard, but did not wholly understand. Did not wholly believe. He stood a moment, his body rigid, his mouth annoyed by a smile. Then he lifted his hands, slowly, one at a time. His fingers felt for his ear lobes and found riddled flesh only. He looked at his hands, and the sight of the scarlet stain struck a spark of perception inside his head. A spark that touched off a whole powder keg of understanding, when he looked back into the glass.

"Why—you dish-faced son!" was all that Lonny could say.

Lonny would see later that he could

have played it a lot smarter than he did. He could have passed the thing off as a joke at the time, got hold of his pistol, and waited for his tormentor out of the city limits. But, just then, all he could see was the way he had been mutilated. He had seen others who'd been ear-marked with a gun, to go through life wearing the mark of shame and defeat. And his first reaction was as instinctive as breathing.

He had no gun, but there was a bottle on the counter in front of him. His fingers closed around the neck, and he hurled it with all his strength, straight at the grinning face. The Platte River gunslinger dropped to one knee, smashed the bottle with a bullet as it sailed over his head, then stood up again, still grinning.

Lonny let out a yell that was half a sob, and frog-jumped across the counter, hands reaching for the stock of the shotgun that protruded from the rag shelf. The fat barman tried to intercede, but Lonny rammed him with his head and knocked him down.

He got to the shotgun, got the greasy stock in his hands, the hammers under his thumbs. But he forgot that the top of his head was showing above the hardwood. He was pushing the gun's twin barrels up over the counter when the place fell in on him with a crashing red roar that turned blacker than night and swallowed him . . .

FOR what seemed an interminable time and distance, Lonny was confined to a bed on Cranky Crowe's jolting trail wagon, on top of the warbags and bedrolls that overlay the canned stuff and duffel. The wagon seemed to roll at an unreasonable rate of speed, and every lurch and jolt skewered Lonny's swollen cranium with a long, red-hot scalpel. His mouth was inflamed and dry, and his bandaged head felt too large to fit into the water barrel.

He didn't know much that went on, for more than a week, and by then the fists and faces of his companions were commencing to heal up. But he could still tell from looking at them that a fearful fight had taken place in the Trail's End Bar, after he had blanked out. Cranky's potato-nosed countenance still looked as though it had been caught in a wringer, and even Link Bisbee had a mouse under each eye, his nose pushed over to one side of his face.

"We lost the Civil War again, back in that damyank town," Link told him, the first night he was in shape to be talked to. "But we buried our own dead, as Dutch Longstreet used to say, when he should of retreated, and didn't . . .

"Cranky got that ornery-eyed gunslinger with a bottle, while he was pullin' down on you. None of the rest had guns, and outside of there bein' fourteen of them to our eight, the thing got equalized. That fat barkeep got holt of his shotgun, but we was too scrambled for him to shoot any Texans with scattershot and not hit his pals. Then Strap laid him low with a cue ball, off one of the tables."

"Whyn't you saw the ears off that dish-faced clown, and bring 'em to me as souvenirs?" Lonny croaked.

The tall trail boss grunted. "That's a funny thing. I lost track o' that critter, bein' kept kinda busy there. An' when the gendarme got there with his posse, the dish-faced son was gone."

"Did you find out what his name was?" Lonny asked, already making plans for the future.

But the trail boss shook his head. "I didn't even think to ask."

"What did he do to me—besides decoratin' me with that Platte River underslope?" Lonny asked bitterly.

"Jus' creased your scalp good—the way I've done mustang horses to ketch 'em," Bisbee said. "He sure could call his shots, with them guns. So I guess he didn't mean to put you away. But I sure didn't expect you to ever git up, the way you went down."

"Been better if he'd killed me," Lonny said tonelessly. "Better for him, and better for me."

"You got a nasty gash that'll give you a center hair part from now on," Bisbee said, ignoring the last. "But you'll be up nighthawkin' again, one of these days. But I'll warn you now to step wide of Cranky. He's plumb down on you, for gettin' us run outa town before he got his dry rot doctored. They wouldn't even give 'im time to git a bottle, an' he's drunk all the lemon extract in the wagon, and gittin' meaner by the day. But it would have did your heart good, to see him wade inta them Platte River toughs, after you'd got put to sleep. He's a ring-tailed roarer, in a fight."

AT FIRST, when Lonny contemplated the future, he wanted to die. All the way up, on the drive—through dust storms and hail storms and plain storms, through stampedes and all the long lonely nights with the cavvy—Lonny had rejoiced in the thought of returning to the brush country and doing the strutting he'd be entitled to do, among the younkers his own age. A he-blooded cowhand, who'd been up the Trail and back. The thought now of skulking back, wearing the earmark of a Platte River tough, of being the object of jibes and catcalls instead of praise and envy, made dying look easy.

But, as the weeks passed and the skewering pains left his head and the strength began to flow back into him, there began to be a change. Instead of a will to die, he was taken with an obsession to live. Live long enough, anyhow, to ride back to Ogallala, hunt down the man who had ruined him, and exact a full vengeance.

By the time they'd crossed the Canadian River, back well into Texas, he had recovered his head wound sufficiently that he believed he could ride a horse. And the obsession by now had him by the throat, like a hand.

At Amarillo, Cranky's dry rot was making him poorly, and Link Bisbee authorized an afternoon's layover to get it attended to, even knowing that the outfit would have to do its own grub-spoiling from there on. Link asked Lonny to go along, but Lonny chose to remain with the wagon.

"You're makin' too much of a pair of notched ears," Link told him, mistaking his reason for refusing. "Besides, nobody knows what you got under that turban."

"I ain't made as much of them notches as I will do," Lonny said fervently. "The time'll come when I'll cut notches somewheres else."

Link shrugged, and went off with the others. Returning early to the livery corral, he found Lonny wearing his borrowed .45 and saddling up his big-chested Mexican sorrel. Link looked at the warbag and bedroll and grub sack on the ground and feigned surprise.

"You so pantin' to git back to the brush country you can't wait for us all?" he asked.

"I'm not headin' for the brush country," Lonny told him. "I'm ridin' back for the Platte."

"What you aim to do on the Platte?" Link asked, needlessly.

"I'm goin' to shoot me a Nebraska coyote," Lonny said. "When I go back to the brush country, I'm goin' to be wearin' his ears on my watch chain!"

"I can't let you do it," Link said regretfully. "I give your Uncle Jed my word I'd bring you back to the brush country, in good shape."

"I'd *go* back, in good shape," Lonny said through the lump the words brought to his throat. "But, the shape I'm in, I won't go back without some watch fobs!"

Lonny rested his hand on the grips of the .45, and Link looked at him a while in silence, sympathy and understanding in his eyes. "Tell you what," he said at last. "Before you do anything nonsensical, let's see if you're ready to go back to the Platte."

Walking around to Cranky's cupboard at the rear of the wagon, Bisbee took out a can of tomatoes, and set it up on the ground, ten long steps away.

"All right," he said. "Let's see you hurt that can."

Lonny drew the .45. It weighed two and a half pounds, and Lonny was still shaky. The first four slugs raised dust geysers around the can, but none touched the tin. Desperate, Lonny cocked the gun a final time and used both hands to hold it. This time, the can leaped into the air and fell on its side, bleeding red juice from a ragged hole.

"You didn't pass," Link Bisbee said, taking the empty gun away from him. "That Platte River gunslinger won't give you five shots, when you come up against him. He won't give you one shot, the way you handle that gun. And you're not goin' back to shoot somebody in the back an' git stretched up to a cottonwood limb."

Lonny listened, not listening. Lonny was staring in odd fascination at the stream of red that gushed from the punctured can, feeling like he might lose his dinner.

"You can have this hoglaig back, when we hit Stockton," Bisbee went on, watching his face. "Learn how to shoot it, and you can go north with me again in the spring. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough," Lonny said. Then he walked over to the fence and was sick.

CHAPTER II

KILL-CRAZY

LONNY was still sick, when they hit Fort Stockton, a week or so afterward. But he took his wage money into a gun shop and bought two short-barreled .38's that had balance and fitted his hands. They were lighter than the .45, which belonged to his Uncle Jed anyhow, and they didn't cost so much to shoot. With the rest of his money, he bought six cases of ammunition, which he told the dealer to send out to his uncle's brush ranch. Then, broke and hungry, he set out for home.

He rode the back streets and trails, avoiding all who knew him, even though his head bandage still concealed his ears. Once back at the ranch, he refused to leave it, and continued to wear the ragged, dirty bandage—refusing meantime to give any explanation, either of bandage or new guns or his incessant practice shooting with the .38's.

The day came when the rotten bandage fell off of its own accord. His puzzled uncle made reference to his missing ear lobes, and Lonny knocked him down, then fashioned a new turban out of a spare shirt, saddled his horse, and rode off.

At the neighboring Fiddleback outfit, he got a job riding line, at a lonely camp where visitors were few and far between. He ordered more ammunition, the cost to be held out of his wages, and went on schooling himself in the art of juggling guns.

A natural nimbleness of hand, plus months of unceasing practice, wrought their magic. By the time spring found him back at Picador, he could hold his hands at arm's length in front of him,

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palms turned toward the ground, have a playing card placed on the back of each—then drop his hands, draw his guns, and perforate each pasteboard before it got to the ground. He could throw a full tomato can into the air, pull the .38's, and put ten slugs through it while it was coming down, not caring for the red fluid that got splattered around.

But his favorite stunt was to have someone throw a bottle at him, and he'd duck underneath it, smashing it with one shot as it went over him. And, remembering the dish-faced man again, he wore gloves at all times, except when eating and sleeping. His were the only gloves in the whole trail outfit, and his hands looked soft and white.

"Y'all better be careful how you hooraw that boy," Link Bisbee cautioned the rest of the trail crew. "He's goin' north on business. An' don't be sucked inta sudden death by them baby blue eyes o' his. He's about as hair-triggered as them guns he totes. I don't want no killin's in my outfit."

"Then you'd ought to leave him behind," Cranky Crowe snapped, being cook and the only man privileged to criticize the boss. "You know what he got us into last year, an' he didn't go up with hell in his neck, like now."

"I wouldn't take 'im, if I hadn't passed my word," Link said mildly. "But he's not the kind it's safe to sowbelly on. He's got it in for that Platte River joker now till it would be suicide to stand in his way."

Lonny overheard the foreman's remark, but found it neither pleasing nor amusing. It struck him as a simple statement of fact, and he didn't give it another thought. He was going north to kill a man, and when it came to shooting a gun, he was better than any of them knew. But he wouldn't know, until he reached the Platte, whether he was good enough.

Lonny's nighthawking days were behind him, now. Having made one trip up the Trail, he was now a full-fledged hand. He'd have to have more years, more trips up and back, before he could claim a position at lead or swing. But it wasn't a pleasure ride he was on, anyhow, and he didn't mind the taste of drag dirt. When the going got tiresome, he had only to conjure up a dish-shaped face with friendly eyes, and then he'd know that he could eat all the dirt this side of the Mississippi, if such would mean getting to where he was bound.

Lonny was different in other ways, also, from the unsalted jinglebob of a year ago. He was taller and fuller, and moved with a swift, sure balance and purpose that was rare in a younker not yet eighteen. With his long red hair curling over his shirt collar and around his ears, you weren't conscious that his ear lobes were gone, unless you looked close. But the gloves were conspicuous, in a calling that put thick calluses on the hands, so that gloves were superfluous, and he weighted himself at all times with his two .38's. Over and above these tangible manifestations, there was a cocked look about him that made others uneasy in his presence.

"I've seen the Earps in action," Bisbee said one evening, after Lonny had yielded to general request and put on a shooting show for the crew. "And Bat Masterson and John Ringo. I've never seen nobody yet that can touch the kid, at target shootin'. Might be different though, if the target was a man."

Lonny overheard, and smiled. If the target were a certain man, it would be just the same as putting holes through a tomato can . . .

THE day they brought Ogallala into view again was the day Lonny had been waiting for, more than a year. The herd this time was consigned to the Hoe outfit, home ranch of which was on the Cheyenne River, somewhere north. But A. A. Hale, the big man in Hoe, was down to Ogallala to take delivery. And when they had tallied out, Hale turned the herd over to a couple of Hoe riders and rode to the Picador wagon to settle up.

"I'm trailing this bunch to the Crow Agency, in Montana," he announced over the beans and sourdough biscuits Cranky had readied. "I pay forty dollars and found, and work is year around for them that want it."

The Picador hands, with one exception, announced an intent to return to the Pecos. That one exception was Lonny

Beal. "I might be hangin' out in this country, for a while," Lonny said. "I'll know, when I've been to town."

"You'll find me at the Planters' Hotel," Hale told him.

Lonny nodded, dumped his plate into the wreck pan, then shifted his saddle from the horse he'd ridden that morning to his own sure-footed Mexican sorrel.

"What's the sweat?" Bisbee asked him. "Rest of us will be goin' in right away."

"I don't reckon I'll be needin' any help," Lonny said, turning the sorrel toward the settlement.

The sign at the edge of town hadn't changed: *Entering Ogallala. Indians and Texans Forbidden to Carry Firearms in City.*

Lonny tested his pistols by firing one slug from each into the face of the sign. The sound drew no attention, and Ogallala must have believed that all Texans came in crowds, for no one challenged the lone red-haired cowboy who rode into town, wearing two pistols and a pair of buckskin gloves.

He left the sorrel at the livery corral, shoved his gloves in a back pocket, and walked down town. When he came to a barbershop, he stepped inside. He wasn't fussy about his grooming, but he wanted Dish Face to see his ears.

"Freeze your ears somewhere, cowboy?" the barber inquired conversationally, as falling hair revealed the missing lobes.

"I caught 'em in a transom," Lonny said. "Listenin' to other people's business."

The barber laughed nervously, glanced at Lonny's face, and almost dropped his shears. "No offense," he said apprehensively, and hastily finished his task.

Out on the sidewalk again, Lonny Beal went hunting. He looked first for the Trail's End Bar, but there was no such place in town. The ground where he remembered it as standing now accommodated a saddle shop.

"Trail's End Bar?" the bearded saddlemaker repeated. "Well, sir, it used to occupy this buildin'. Bunch o' Longhorns wrecked it, year ago, an' Charlie Hart that run it went back to Alasky, where he hailed from. Said it was too far north for Texans."

"You tell me the name of a citizen around here with a dish face and hair like a horse's tail?"

"Know one with a face like a horse's tail—and no hair a-tall!"

Lonny made a systematic search of the town, starting with the bars and sporting houses and ending with the stores and shops. But he didn't see the face he sought. And, not knowing the man's name, he didn't find anyone who could help him out. He tried asking after Dish Face by description, but was rewarded by blank stares or more bad jokes. In all cases, those he interviewed displayed keener interest in his ears than in his words, and rage choked him till he couldn't talk, anyhow.

"My friend is not in town," he told Link Bisbee, when he came across the Picador crew, drinking peaceably in a joint. "But he wore range clothes. He could be around here, and not be in town. If I can have my pay, I think I'll hang around."

"There's a hell of a big country here," Bisbee said, handing him a check. "Bigger'n Texas, if you take it all. But if nothin' will do you but to find the ornery-eyed son, I'll wish you luck. I just hope you ain't too disappointed, when you do."

"If I find him," Lonny said, "I won't be disappointed."

He said no to an offer of a drink, much to Cranky's relief, shook hands all around, and crossed over to the Planters' Hotel. Double-A Hale was sitting in the lobby, smoking a black cigar. Beside him sat a girl so pretty it made Lonny bashful to look at her. The girl's hazel eyes appraised him as he stopped before the rancher, and seemed to favor him, until they touched his ears. Something like horror killed the interest in them, and Lonny's hatred of the man he sought became a darkness in his mind.

"Mr. Hale," he said, speaking between his teeth, "I'll take that job."

The rancher looked up leisurely. Recognition showed in his eyes, and disapproval, and another thing that Lonny couldn't give a name to.

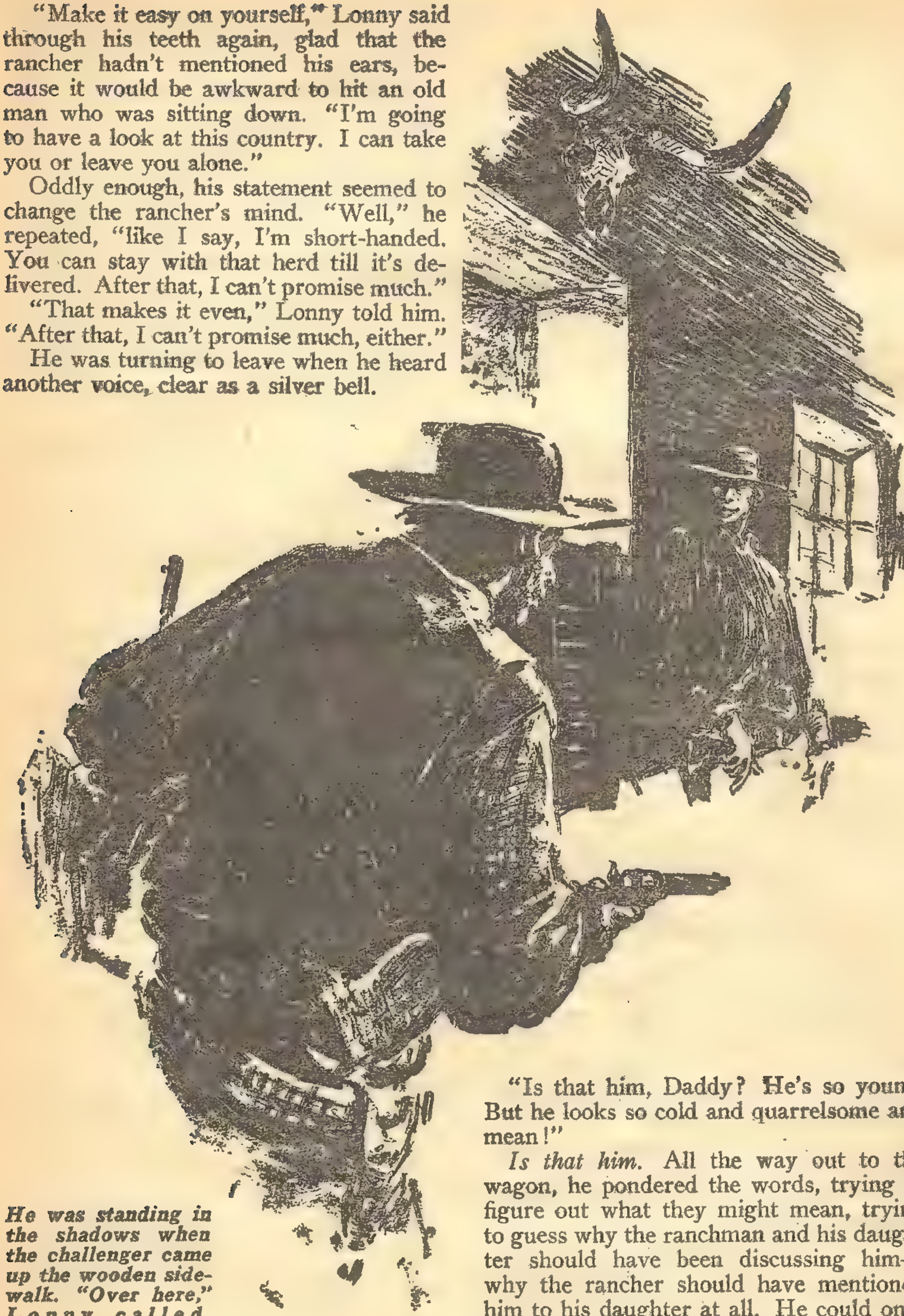
"I don't know," the ranchman said, looking at Lonny's ears. "I'm shorthanded. But I don't believe I've got work for gun-totin' Texans that wear gloves."

"Make it easy on yourself," Lonny said through his teeth again, glad that the rancher hadn't mentioned his ears, because it would be awkward to hit an old man who was sitting down. "I'm going to have a look at this country. I can take you or leave you alone."

Oddly enough, his statement seemed to change the rancher's mind. "Well," he repeated, "like I say, I'm short-handed. You can stay with that herd till it's delivered. After that, I can't promise much."

"That makes it even," Lonny told him. "After that, I can't promise much, either."

He was turning to leave when he heard another voice, clear as a silver bell.



He was standing in the shadows when the challenger came up the wooden sidewalk. "Over here," Lonny called.

"Is that him, Daddy? He's so young. But he looks so cold and quarrelsome and mean!"

Is that him. All the way out to the wagon, he pondered the words, trying to figure out what they might mean, trying to guess why the ranchman and his daughter should have been discussing him—why the rancher should have mentioned him to his daughter at all. He could only guess that Hale had picked up his story at the wagon, and had repeated it to his daughter.

Maybe that would explain Hale's sudden reluctance to hire him, after offering him a job.

He was able, in the end, to accept his own explanation of a thing that could have no explanation otherwise, and put the whole matter from his mind.

LONNY didn't find the dish-faced man at the Crow Agency, or at near-by Hardin, where he rode with the rest of the Hoe drovers crew, when the herd had been delivered. But he did find trouble, and in a manner that would become familiar with the years.

He hadn't really cared anything about the red-haired girl he met in the Hardin dancehall. Down on the Pecos, among his own people, he wouldn't have been caught dead in her company. But girls didn't grow on the cottonwoods in Montana, and this one could smile and was light on her feet. She didn't look twice at the place where Lonny's ear-lobes should have been, and he noticed she was trying to keep away from a black-haired, beefy man with sweat-stained shirt—a man Lonny instinctively disliked and would have crossed anyhow.

Lonny had thought for a while he'd get away with that piece of folly, without any big trouble. He was still in a glide at the end of his third straight dance with the redhead when a strong hand caught him by the shoulder and turned him around, setting him up for a fist that Lonny ducked under.

The black-haired man wasn't heeled, as Lonny was, so Lonny went along, with fists. When Black Hair had got back to his feet, he licked the blood from his crushed mouth and looked at Lonny's ears.

"I'm leaving here now," he panted. "I'll be back in three minutes. If you ain't gone, you'll pull something worse than a pair of notched ears."

If the black-haired man was wanting to insure that Lonny would stay, he did well to mention Lonny's ears. "I'll be here," Lonny told him, his face going long and sharp.

And he was. He was standing in the shadows outside the dancehall door when the challenger came up the wooden sidewalk, moonlight glinting on the pistol in his hand.

"Over here," Lonny called. And the night was shattered by a stuttering crash of guns. The black-haired man's two slugs ripped into the dancehall's clapboards, inches from where Lonny's head had been. All four of Lonny's went true. They said afterwards the black-haired man was dead before he'd touched the ground.

Lonny was in the Hardin jail a week before Double-A Hale got around to springing him. But Lonny wasn't greatly worried. He gathered from the jail talk that Black Jack Duston and his four brothers all had long been ripe for a killing, and the town's only regret was that he'd not done a clean job. More important, he learned that Double-A Hale dragged considerable water in southern Montana, and never had been known to leave an employee in the lurch.

But Hale, to Lonny, was cold and direct. "Here's what you've got comin'," he said, writing out a check. "I thought maybe I could use you. I was wrong."

"You're not firing me," Lonny said. "I'd already quit. But tell me where I was in the wrong. He had threatened me, and he left the place to get a gun."

"You got in the wrong, somehow, back before I'd seen you," Hale lectured him. "Settin' yourself up as a killer, bushwhackin' behind them notched ears that make you look like a pushover. Keep on the way you're headed, and every fool in the country that fancies himself a gunslinger will come around to give you a try."

"And maybe the one I'm lookin' for will be among 'em," Lonny said.

"Maybe," the ranchman grunted. "If you live that long. You're qualified. But lots o' men are qualified."

BLACK DUSTON'S brothers believed themselves qualified. When Lonny walked out of the jail, the four of them were waiting for him. When the smoke had cleared, two were dead and two were dying. Lonny, looking at them, unscratched, could think of them as four tomato cans. The law thought even less.

"I saw it all," the sheriff said. "They tried for you. Nobody will want you for this, without it's to pin a medal on your shirt." And Lonny left Hardin with his reputation established.

Having money in his pocket, and only one purpose in life, he forgot working and went hunting, full-time. Because he was already in Montana, and because Dish Face was as liable to be in Montana as anywhere, he rode north and combed Miles City, Plentywood, and Fort Benton. Exhausting his modest poke, he spent the winter tending bar in Landusky in the Little Rockies, where many faces came and went. Come spring, he joined the branding roundups and looked at Grassrange, Malta, and Chinook The wages earned here carried him to Bear Paw and Cut Bank and Great Falls, during the slow season.

And in the fall, he followed the beef roundups from Kalispell and Big Arm south along the Bitter Root and the Big Hole to the Beaverhead.

He didn't find the dish-faced man, and didn't learn his name. But he learned the topography of Montana like the map on his hand. And he built a reputation that was bound to come to the attention of every man who aspired to fame as a gunman.

In all this time, he never provoked a fight. He didn't have to crowd the fights himself. The very nature of his search carried him into places where trouble could be had without the asking. And, in the beginning, the sight of his clipped ears led many a man into the same wrong conclusion jumped at by the black-haired man in Hardin.

For he kept his reddish hair clipped short at all times, telling himself that he did so to make certain that the dish-faced man would see his ears, and recognize him, if Lonny should meet him and pass him by. But he knew there was another reason, if one he could not give name to. He knew, without knowing why, that he had to go on showing his ears until he'd killed or similarly notched the ears of the man who had marked him.

And, quite without intending it that way, he made the notches the mark of a killer—or at least of a winner, instead of defeat. For he always won his fights. Yet, since the shootout in Hardin, he seldom killed. It required greater skill merely to disable, to select an arm or shoulder as a target, and hit it, while in danger of being killed himself. And Lonny was skilled enough that he could call his shots, except where the odds were too heavy against him.

"I just can't make you out," a peace officer in Missoula confessed to him, after a non-fatal fracas there. "I been hearing about you, two-three years now. Gunslingers as a rule want to put their enemies down for good, and not risk a bullet in the back someday. But you—why, you knock around the country, buildin' a whole hostile army at your back. Ain't you got no sentiment?"

"They all think I'm easy, on account of my ears," Lonny shrugged. "They find out their mistake. If they want a return engagement, I'll oblige."

What he really was saying was that the men he met and defeated, at their own invitation, didn't count with him. He was looking for a man he couldn't find, and he figured that when his reputation had spread sufficiently, that man would find him. A dish-faced man with ornery eyes and a sense of humor that led him to mutilate and mark for life younkers who were minding their own affairs, drinking their first red-eye, and wanting only to be left alone.

CHAPTER III

BIG GUN FROM MONTANA

WHEN Lonny Beal returned to Hardin, in the spring of the second year since he first had seen the place, he was in the service of the Montana Stock Growers Association. The reputation he had built together with the knowledge he'd acquired of Montana brands and ranges, had brought an offer of employment as range detective. And, since it was a traveling job, Lonny had taken it.

His first act after reaching town was to buy a fresh haircut. The first man he ran into after leaving the shop was Double-A Hale, just up from the Agency, Lonny would learn, where he had delivered another drive of Texas cattle.

"Sure the Indian agents like Texas cattle," the Association secretary had smiled one time, when Lonny had brought the matter up. "They ain't got to eat the meat. And Longhorns ain't so apt to get stampeded back to their home ranges, after bein' tallied and paid for. I'm afraid that's been known to happen, with locally purchased stock."

Hale halted, seeing Lonny, and offered a hand. But his eyes took in Lonny's gloves and haircut and guns, and they held no warmth.

"I heard you were still alive," he said in a way that hinted he found no particular joy in the discovery. "Still looking for that man who ear-marked you?"

"I'll find him," Lonny said. And the ranchman looked away.

"Is it still important—after all these years?"

"Nothing else is important," Lonny said, wondering at this man's power to make him feel himself in the wrong, and ready to fight to prove it.

"It never will be, I guess, unless you let it," the rancher told him. "But it's your affair, not mine—as long as you stay in Montana."

"I reckon we could call that coincidence," Lonny said. "I was just headin' for Wyoming. Cheyenne River Country, to be exact."

"Then ride clear of Hoe range, or I'll see you hang," Hale said clearly, looking straight at him. "I've got no hands, and no neighbors, that need killin'."

"More coincidence," Lonny said. "It's Hoe range I'm headed for. But you ain't got to worry. I'm on the side o' law an' order."

He produced his Asociation badge, and Hale's cold manner curdled. "The hell with you and the Association. I'm stealin' no cattle. And I'm losin' none."

"I hear it different," Lonny said calmly. "My boss tells me Hoe cattle are findin' their way into the Agency beef issue, under worked brands. Beef looks same to most agents, and that one at Crow, I hear, has got a horn drooped for local cowmen, anyhow. But rustlin' is Association business—even if you are willin' to go on feedin' Indians and enrichin' the thieves."

Hale looked at him a time in silence, then spoke thinly. "Tell your boss I'll worry about my own cattle—and ketch my own thieves."

"I don't tell him," Lonny said regretfully. "He tells me. Besides, I might run into a man down that way that I'm lookin' for. He don't seem to be in Montan'."

Hale turned away, and Lonny looked after him with puzzled eyes. When a big cowman wasn't interested in apprehending thieves who preyed on his beef herds, there was a buried deuce somewhere in the deck.

He was jarred out of his rumination by the sound of a banging door and the accompanying sound of a voice he had heard only once, but would not forget while he lived.

"Daddy, I'm ready. Oh—hello, Mr. Beal. What are you doing in Hardin?"

Lonny turned, adequately prepared for the vision of freshness and vital loveli-

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ness that met his eyes, but rocked to the bottom by the realization that the rancher's daughter remembered him. She'd only seen him once, and then her father hadn't introduced them. But she knew his name. She seemed glad to see him.

"Why, hello, Miss Hale," he heard his voice saying stiffly, as his hat came off. "Mighty good to see you."

She came closer, smiling timidly, looking into his face. She did not look at his ears this time, but he thought she was fighting her eyes all the time to keep from doing so, and his hatred of the dish-faced stranger received a booster shot that brought the darkness back to his mind. The darkness that passing time was beginning to fade and dissipate, in spite of his great resolve.

Hale was between them, then, speaking harshly. "Mr. Beal informs me he is going to honor us with his presence at Hoe, without invitation."

"But—but why?" the girl burst out. And the look of horror and dismay that crossed her face left Lonny as puzzled as he was desolated.

"You might ask him," Hale said angrily. "But I wouldn't put any faith in his answer."

Then, abruptly, they were gone, Hale stomping down the hollow walk, half-dragging the girl toward a buckboard down the street. Lonny, stunned, stood looking after them, wondering how his life had been entangled with theirs. Wondering what he had done, unwittingly, to make his presence so obnoxious to them both, while the girl at any rate had at first seemed glad to see him.

"But, Daddy," he heard the girl protest, while her father was untying the team, "maybe he's not all bad. After all, the men he's killed would have been hanged, if the law counted for anything out here."

"Smallpox and typhoid are great killers, too," he heard the old man reply gruffly. "But I don't want them at Hoe!"

LONNY stayed in town a couple of days, trying to straighten out his thinking. Failing in this, he saddled his Mexican sorrel, and headed for the Cheyenne River, taking the long way around. He had a look at the Tongue River reservation, to the east. There, by accident, he came upon a cow branded Flag on the left ribs, a location where the Flag outfit to the north never slapped an iron. The brand books in his saddlebag failed to solve the puzzle. But Hoe branded on the left ribs, and the Hoe iron would work handily into a flag.

He talked with agent and trader, but those gentlemen were cagy, and he didn't want to excite suspicion. So he rode on, but slowly, down through Quietus and Spotted Horse, to Sundance and the Black Hills. He joked and gossiped with strangers along the way, and heard jocular references to the "Flag road brand, on the ribs," as well as to unadvertised calf drives, up from the Cheyenne to the agencies, after roundup in the spring.

Aside from a hidden branding corral in the Belle Fourche badlands, a corral where a little scouting turned up a rusted Flag iron, he found nothing definite to go on. But he'd found enough, and he pondered again Hale's reluctance to have him work the Cheyenne River range.

It wasn't likely that Double-A would be rustling his own calves. Not unless Hoe could be a camouflage syndicate, and Hale was robbing the stockholders. But he could get nothing conclusive on this. And then there was the girl's odd behavior, at first in Ogallala and later in Hardin.

Well, time might hold the answers, though he might have defeated himself, letting slip to Hale that he was coming down to work his range. It was funny, as he thought of it, how things were working out. Neither he nor Hale would have believed, when Lonny hired out to the rancher two years ago, that he'd be sleuthing Hoe range one day, in the pay of the Montana protective league . . .

The Wyoming calf roundups were in full swing when Lonny arrived on the Cheyenne. He passed himself off as a rep for the Hoodoo outfit, on the Little Missouri, and as such had a close-up view of all branding activities.

He was accepted, without visible suspicion or resentment, around the Hoe wagons. And he attached significance to the fact. If Double-A Hale were mixed up personally in any ranicaboos involving

Hoe stock, he would have warned his crew, and the warning would have showed up in their treatment of him.

Hale himself was cool and aloof, giving no indication either to Lonny or to others that he'd ever before seen the gloved notched-eared Hoodoo rep. Moss Iba, the Hoe foreman, had heard of Lonny and his quest, and went out of his way early to let the earmarked gunman know how he stood on the Cheyenne.

"I hear tell you cut a fat hog in the ham, up in Montana. Well, this ain't Montan'. Down here, they pay bounties on coyotes, slick-ears and notched ears, just alike. You start anything around my wagons, and I'll mail them famous ears to the predatory animal control board, to claim my re-ward."

"It's been tried," Lonny conceded, not so touchy and inclined to press a fight as once. "Likely, it'll be tried again. Just don't git the notion notched ears are easier than slick ones to collect. You and me ain't got any quarrel."

"We'll have a quarrel, if you put on any of your behavior around my wagons," the Hoe roundup boss retorted. "You don't pack any Hoodoo down here."

Moss Iba was dark and black and curly, like an Angus bull. One night at the campfire, he'd been doctoring a leg scratch, and sat with the leg of his jeans rolled up, exposing a limb that was haired like a dog's. The jinglebob touched a match to it, in fun, and it flared up like a brush fire. When he'd beat the blaze out, Iba backed the kid up against a wagon wheel and beat him with his fists till they both were red with the jinglebob's blood.

"All right, Iba," Lonny said, unable to keep out of it any longer. "That's enough."

The foreman either didn't or wouldn't hear. Lonny caught him by the shoulder and twisted him around. Iba snarled and grabbed for him, and Lonny struck him an elbow clout that knocked him backwards into the fire. The foreman bellowed like he was being branded, and —facing Lonny with smoking clothes—slapped at the place where his gun would have been, had he had it with him.

"If you really want it, go and fetch it," Lonny told him, bowing to what appeared to be inevitable. "But be sure it's what you want, while you're free to decide."

Iba glowered at him long in silence, breathing through his mouth. Glower and snort and all, the foreman's eyes were the first to fall.

"I'll fetch it—when the time comes," he promised. "But I'll name the time."

That ended it, for the time. But Hale heard about it next day, and watched his chance to jump Lonny in private.

"I heard what happened at the Brush Crick wagon last night, Beal," he said aggrievedly, reining up beside Lonny in a draw. "It's the kind of thing I knew would happen, if you showed up on this range. Dammit, death and trouble follow you the way buzzards trail a blacklaig cow. Clear out, or I'll arrange to have you cleared out."

"Your man Iba is a rugged citizen," Lonny said mildly in return. "But he sure don't know how to brand a critter."

"What you say?" the ranchman demanded sharply. "What do you mean by that?"

"He's had two fires burnin' nothing but hair brands since I been watchin'," Lonny told him. "Iba's in on it, because the iron men do the same kind of job when he's lookin' down their necks as when he's over the next hill."

LONNY didn't have to explain a hair brand to Double-A Hale—how if the heated iron were applied lightly to a calf's side it would singe the hair only, without scarring the skin below, and would look genuine at the time, but soon grow out. He did, however, tell him of the gossip he'd picked up in the Black Hills, of the misbranded Flag cow at the agency, and the hidden corral with the rusted Flag iron on the Belle Fourche.

Hale heard him out, and looked as if he'd been hit with a club. But, when Lonny had finished, the ranchman shook his head.

"I don't believe it," he stated flatly.

A branded calf came bawling down the draw, looking for its mamma. Lonny took a chance and spurred his sorrel alongside to put a rope on it. Hale bought Longhorned cattle for resale to the Indian beef ration, but his Hoe stock was bred up with Durham and Angus strains. For a horse and a man who'd cut their teeth on Texas cattle, these bred-up slugs were play.

"Now do you believe it?" Lonny asked, roughing the calf's hair to make the brand disappear.

Hale stared down with hard, bright eyes. He couldn't deny the brand. But he still wouldn't allow Lonny his point.

"I can't believe that Moss is in it," he said.

"We can ask him," Lonny said in answer. "Here he comes."

Iba had ridden up over the lip of the draw and, seeing Lonny and Hale, had veered toward them, at a trot. He was wearing his pistol, and two riders came on behind him, also armed. The thought crossed Lonny's mind that the foreman had not only chosen the time—he had brought help.

Lonny released the evidence, and got his back against his horse.

"What's up?" the foreman demanded, pulling in and staring down.

"You—I expect," Lonny said. "And your rustlin' game, too. I just been showin' Double-A one of your hair brands. Been tellin' him about a brandin' corral on the Belle Fourche, and about a Flag road brand. About an Indian agent who's named you the man he's been buyin' Flag-branded Wyomin' cattle from, when there's no Flag brand registered in the state."

Iba's black eyes turned yellow as he listened. "Who in the hell are you, anyhow?"

Lonny reached one hand up to the flap of his shirt pocket, turned it up and showed the badge pinned underneath. Iba stared at it and his cheeks turned hard.

"You're lower down than I thought," he growled. "Coyotes only fetch a bounty. Association spies bring a reward!"

When he'd said it, he made his play. His companions backed him up, and they were so placed that Lonny was threatened by a three-way crossfire. For the first time since that day in Hardin, he knew himself to be in a jam. But his trained reflexes sustained him. His first shot knocked the Hoe foreman out of his saddle, and his next toppled the topscrew's right bower.

Hale himself shot the other man, and it all was over almost before the horses had time to shy.

The only angle that caused Lonny to have misgivings was that, like in Hardin, he had been pressed too hard to place his shots.

Hale had only winged his man, but Iba and the other were dead.

It was starting to look as if Double-A had called the turn. Death was starting to follow Lonny like a hungry dog. He had fed the dog, without a thought of obligating himself for future feedings. But the dog had adopted him, had claimed him, because of that feeding. The thing was out of Lonny's hands.

"Take a look around you," Hale said accusingly. "See what we've done here. See what I been talking about."

"I'm starting to see what you been talking about," Lonny said. "But how would you have had it different? They showed themselves guilty, the way they took what I said."

"They showed themselves guilty," Hale conceded. "But look where it leaves me. I'm halfway through a roundup, and short a wagonboss. I don't know where I'll find another one, on short notice."

"You're lookin' at one," Lonny surprised himself by saying. "What I mean is—I'll take over and see you through. I've done the job I came here to do. If I put you behind the eight-ball, gettin' it done, I'll pull you out."

"You?" Hale said skeptically. "You ramrod an outfit big as Hoe—and you nothing but a Texas gunslinger?"

"Give me a chance," Lonny said, still surprising himself in what he said, "while you find somebody you want to keep. I can fill Moss Iba's boots, while you shop around. You sure couldn't do any worse, if you feel like gamblin'."

"What about the man you've sworn to find—and kill?" Hale countered.

"He's waited nigh onto three years," Lonny said. "He'll keep, I reckon, till this roundup is over with."

Hale looked at him, sizing him up again. Finally he shrugged. "All right," he said. "I don't reckon I have much choice. Take over, and show me what you can do. Meantime, I'll be looking for a man to take over, permanent."

CHAPTER IV

THE MARK OF A MAN

LONNY showed what he could do, and the job he turned in was satisfactory. At least, Hale didn't criticize, and for a week he had plenty opportunity, hanging around to keep an eye on all that went on.

Hale didn't say anything, one way or the other. But Lonny knew that men of Hale's stripe were not tongue-tied when things didn't go to suit them, and he drew his own conclusions. Then, when Double-A announced that business required his return to the home ranch, Lonny took his leaving as evidence that the ranchman trusted him to ramrod the roundup alone.

All went well with the branding. The Hoe riders accepted Lonny's ascendancy without visible rancor. They were not friendly, but this suited Lonny, so long as they toed the mark and got the job done. None of the other outfits tried to put anything over on the wagons that were ramrodded by the quiet, soft-spoken gunslinger whose name was now a by-word over most of Wyoming, as well as Montana. Lonny's reputation was enough, by itself, to enforce harmony in the camps. Outside of a couple of Circle Bar hands who dug up a bottle one night and had to be winged as persuasion that the Hoe camps shouldn't be shot up, there wasn't any gunplay on the roundup Lonny supervised.

The calf gathering had started on the headwaters of the Cheyenne and progressed eastward down the river, toward Nebraska. Double-A Hale had left no instructions about Nebraska, and the day the wagons reached the line, Lonny asked Long John French, one of the cooks, how one got to the Hoe home ranch.

"Sets on Old Woman Crick, which is the first left-hand fork of Lightnin' Crick, and Lightnin' is the first left-hand branch o' the Cheyenne, riding that-a-way. Just follow your nose, an' you cain't miss it."

Lonny saddled his Mexican sorrel, and followed his nose. But the cook had neglected to tell him it was a two-day ride, hard going. The first night, Lonny slept under a cutbank with his saddle blanket as cover and a box of dry crackers for supper, washed down by muddy river water. Next day, about noon, he shot a cottontail and roasted it on a stick, seasoning it with salt from a cow lick he'd come across. That evening, just before sundown, he raised the ranch, and found it an eye-filling sight: Big stone house on a hill, surrounded by solid outbuildings and corrals.

Topping the last rise, he came upon a pretty rider, wearing veil and form-fitting habit, riding side-saddle.

"Evening, Miss Hale," he greeted, doffing his hat.

"Good evening, Mr. Beal. It took you a long time to ride down from Hardin."

"I took the long way around," Lonny said, wondering if he only imagined again that the girl looked pleased to see him. "Your dad to home?"

"He was, when I left," the girl said, riding easily beside him. Her eyes went to the side of his head, where his uncut

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hair curled in long drake's tails about his ears. And Lonny suddenly was glad that he had been where barber's services were unavailable, for the last several weeks.

"Still looking for a dish-faced man?" the girl inquired after a silence, and Lonny fancied that her voice sounded tight and strained.

"Word about that sure seems to have got around," Lonny commented, suddenly bad-tempered. "I'd think that someday it would get to him."

"Why is it important?" the girl demanded. "With your hair long, the way it is now, the scars on your ears don't show. And you wear it very well that way, too."

Lonny Beal hadn't known many girls. Not girls to ride with and talk to, like this. He thought at first she was being forward and smart with him, and he faced her sharply, ready to put her in her place. But her big eyes met his so steadfastly and her expression was so guileless and sincere that he couldn't find it in himself to be angry.

He guessed, now that he thought of it, that Hale's daughter likely hadn't known many boys. She was more like a child than any of the other girls Lonny had known. A dauntingly beautiful child.

"I won't wear another man's earmark," Lonny told her. "That's why it's important."

"But you do wear it!" the girl said vehemently. "You wear it like a badge. And you wouldn't need to. All you'd have to do is leave your hair long, and no one would see your scars."

"It's not other people I care about," Lonny said darkly, trying for the first time to express in words the thing that had become so twisted inside him. "It's how *I* feel that counts. And I can't ever feel any other way. Not till I've found that joker and put *my* mark on him."

"But you don't even know who he is," she reminded. "Or where he is. He may be dead now, for all you know. You might go through life looking for him, and never find him. Daddy says it's yourself that you're fighting, not that other man. I think that he's right."

"How come your dad is so inter-ested in a thing that don't concern him?" Lonny asked, watching her. "He's made my business his own, right from the first time I ever saw him. Why?"

"Because," the girl said quickly, "he feels that, in a way, the thing that happened to you was his fault."

"*His* fault?" Lonny blurted. "How does he figure in?"

But the girl now looked confused and frightened, and seemed to regret what she had said. Her eyes would not meet his, and her white teeth nibbled at her lip.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that," she said lamely.

Lonny's interest and curiosity now would not be stayed. "You know the name of this man I'm lookin' for," he accused. "You and your dad both. Who is he? What's his name?"

Again the girl shook her head. "I can't tell you that, either. So don't ask me. And stop looking for him. Please. I don't hate you now. I don't want to hate you."

Her words almost rocked Lonny out of the saddle. So she did know who it was, the dish-faced man he had been searching for, for almost three years. She knew, and it was someone she loved and wanted to protect. Someone she would hate Lonny for killing!

He rode a time in silence, studying her crumpled face, piecing things together in his mind. Puzzling but seemingly unrelated incidents from memory, which were starting to fit together now, to form a discernible pattern.

There was Double's sudden reluctance to give him the job he'd offered, back at Ogallala those three years ago. There was the thing this girl had said about him, when seeing him for the first time, in that hotel lobby. *Is that him.* There was Double-A giving him the job, after he'd said he would stay on in the country, job or no job. There was Double-A's strenuous effort to keep him out of Wyoming, when they met in Hardin.

"So this is that joker's home range, after all," he said aloud. "To sidetrack me, three years ago, your dad gave me that trail job, and fired me in Montana. He didn't want me to come back."

"I won't talk to you any longer!" the girl cried out. She quirted her horse, and galloped on ahead of him toward the ranch. He did not try to overtake her. But she continued to quirt her stockinged pony, as if a pack of hostile Sioux were whooping at her back.

When Lonny arrived at the ranch, minutes later, the girl was nowhere in sight. The man at the cookshack told him that Double-A wasn't home. He was in Hat Creek, a small cowtown some ten miles to the south, using the telegraph in an effort to locate a man to hire as foreman. He wasn't expected back that night.

Lonny made himself to home in the bunkhouse. No one was around. Not even a stable hand, so he had the place to himself. He ate alone, at the cookshack, and tried to draw the dog robber into conversation. But that gentleman seemed to have been warned, and wouldn't even talk about the weather.

Lonny walked up to the house, just before dark, determined to see the girl again. But she wouldn't answer his knocks, and both doors were locked. He turned in early at the bunkhouse, ate a solitary breakfast in the morning, and took the road to Hat Creek.

It being roundup time, and the wagons being north, the country was as deserted as the Hoe ranch. He saw no human being on the long ride, and he did not press his horse. Rather, he rode slowly, thinking of the dish-faced man, feeling hot and cold by turns.

He had known, somewhere inside him all along, that he would catch up with the man he sought eventually. Yet, as the months had merged into years, the fear had grown in him that he wouldn't know the man when he saw him—that he might already have seen him, and passed him by. After all, he'd been drinking that day in Ogallala and had seen all things hazily. There were times, even, when he'd felt that he'd dreamed it all.

But he knew now that it hadn't been a dream. He knew now that the trail was getting warm, would come to an end sometime soon, perhaps in Hat Creek ahead. He wanted both to ride fast and ride slow. He wanted vengeance, but his quest had gone on so long by now that it had come to represent a kind of life's goal. He had the feeling now that life itself would end, along with his strange pilgrimage. That, even if he survived the coming encounter, life would no longer have meaning or point or incentive . . .

HAT CREEK was an abbreviated, one-street settlement, identical in almost every respect to a hundred other similar settlements Lonny had visited since coming up the Trail. There was a livery stable and corral, a store and telegraph office, a saloon with a barbershop adjoining.

From long habit, Lonny made the barbershop his first stop. The place was empty, except for the barber himself, who greeted him warmly, as if delighted to find a client at a time so slack.

Lonny hung his hat on a peg beside the door, removed his gloves but not his guns, folding the former into a rear pocket. He sat in the chair, armed as was his custom, and the barber seemed not to find this eccentricity unusual. He draped the apron over Lonny's body, guns and all, and pinned it at the throat in back, making small talk as he did so.

Lonny paid no attention to the barber. His ears were attuned to the rumble of voices on the other side of the partition. It sounded as if many voices were talking, and he commented on the bar's doing such lively business, at a usually slack time of year.

"Texas outfit delivered a Longhorn herd, couple of days ago," the barber informed him. "They seem to be tryin' to drink Hat Creek dry. But Texicans don't know what barbershops is for."

But Lonny didn't hear all he said. Suddenly—loudly and clearly—a voice had started to speak, on the other side of the wall.

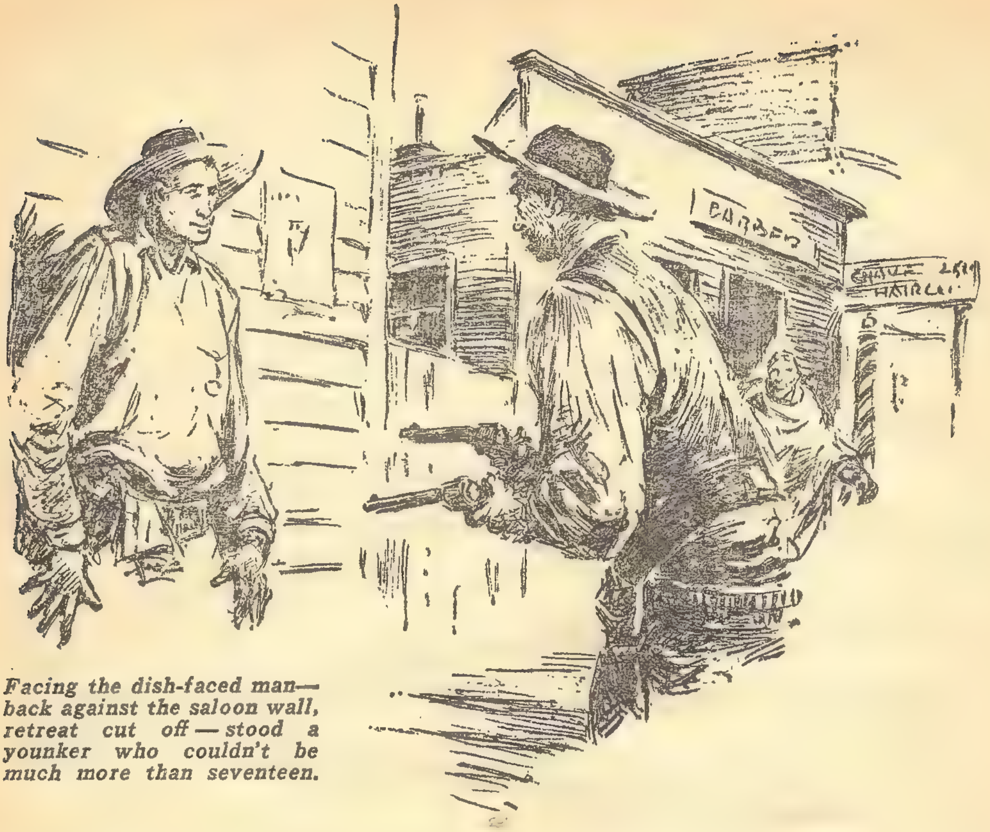
A voice Lonny had heard so many times in memory during the last three years that it was more familiar to him than his own. Even the words that it spoke were unchanged.

"I am a Platte River roarer. This here is my time to howl."

Lonny sat rigidly, listening. Wondering if he'd heard right, or if his reason had cracked under an old tension, and perhaps he had become a victim of hallucinations.

Then the barber chuckled at his ear. "Sounds like Honk Hale is in town again, on another tearer."

His words registered belatedly on Lonny Beal, like a gun that hangs fire.



Facing the dish-faced man—back against the saloon wall, retreat cut off—stood a younker who couldn't be much more than seventeen.

"Honk *Who*?" he blurted. "What did you say his name was?"

"Honk Hale," the barber repeated, looking at him in surprise. "Double-A Hale's son. You know Double-A Hale, don't you?"

"I didn't know Double-A had a son," Lonny heard his voice saying, as if from a great distance. And his mind still refused to believe.

"Most people don't," the barber said comfortably. "The old man keeps him pretty much out o' sight—out in line camps, and around. He's not bright, you know. Horse kicked him in the head, when he was only so high, and he never growed up, except in his body. Thinks he's a great gunslinger—and he is the best this country's ever seen. He's not dangerous, though, till he gits about a quart inside 'im. Then he's a holy terror. Even the old man and the girl can't handle him, then. Double-A has threatened to gut shoot the man that lets him have whiskey. Trouble is, he's such a wizard with them guns o' his, the barkeep don't dare tell him no . . ."

The barber talked on, readying his tools, talk being his stock in trade. But Lonny had heard enough. Lonny was seeing the pattern now, in its entirety, wondering why he had not guessed the truth long before.

But his longest and bitterest thoughts were of himself, not of Hale and his beautiful daughter and halfwitted son. He, Lonny Beal, had thrown over everything that counted and had set himself as a gunman and killer—because of a half-baked moron who didn't matter. He had spent three years of his life, looking for a child-brained north-country waddy who wouldn't even remember him. Wouldn't know him when he saw him. A man Lonny couldn't kill or mark, after all, without setting himself up as a goof-killer. A slayer of idiots.

After that, even his thoughts petered out. He sat sodden and shaken and lifeless as stone. Everything on which he stood had suddenly been jerked out from under him. He had a feeling of dangling, on nothing, above an immense void of nothingness.

Suddenly he heard himself laughing. A laugh that cracked like an idiot's.

His laugh was drowned in an abrupt burst of gunfire on the other side of the thin partition. There was a slashing scrape of boots on lumber, and half a dozen men ran past the shop's open door, seeking safety. Other boot sounds followed, more slowly.

And then Lonny heard the voice he knew so well again.

"You smell like a Longhorn. I don't like Texans."

A fantastic feeling of unreality replaced Lonny's earlier sense of dangling. *This isn't happening now,* he thought. *All this happened, in Ogallala, three years ago. I've lost my grip, is all . . .*

RISING out of the chair, his hair uncut and the barber's cloth still encompassing him like an apron, he walked to the door and stopped. Over in front of the saloon, not fifteen feet from where he stood, he saw the gunman he remembered. Exactly as he remembered. The same squat figure, and oversize head. The same hated dish-face. The same two long-barreled pistols, filling the hairy fists.

Facing the dish-faced man — back against the saloon wall, retreat cut off— stood a younker who couldn't be much more than seventeen. His face was white, but his eyes, while wary and watchful, were cocky and unscared. The younker didn't have a gun.

"Slick-eared dogies from Texas caused a Wyomin' war, once," Dish Face was saying in a genial voice. "We don't want nothin' like that to happen here in Hat Creek."

At that moment, a buckboard rattled onto the street. Lonny, in one glance, identified the driver as Double-A Hale, the girl beside him as his daughter. But the Hales didn't see Lonny. They seemed to see only what was going on, there in front of the saloon. Hale pulled the team to a stop and both jumped out, running toward the dish-faced gunman.

"Honk!" both yelled at once. "Stop it. Come away!" And both voices blended into one voice. Into one agonized, heartbreaking plea.

Reaching the plank walk where he stood, back toward them, they came up, one on either side of him, grabbing his arms. But the dish-faced monster gave an enormous shrug, a backward throw with his immense arms, and both old man and girl were tumbled headlong back into the dusty road. Hale struck his head on a buggy wheel and lay as if stunned. The gun in one of the madman's hands must have struck the girl. She moaned softly in the dust, trying to rise, blood coming from a gash in her chin.

"I don't like Longhorn mavericks," the madman told the cornered youth, without a glance at his father and sister behind him. "They pester me no end."

His manner now was fretful, devoid of its earlier good humor. He started to lift his guns. And the tension that had held Lonny paralyzed suddenly snapped like a taut cord, and he could move, and think. He knew now that life in the last three years had had meaning after all. Monsters like the dish-faced man shouldn't be let at large on the country, ruining lives as he had ruined Lonny's. There would be no joy, no triumph, in winning over a man who wasn't bright, or responsible for what he did. But Honk Hale must be corraled. And, seemingly, no one in this country could do the job.

There wasn't time to unfasten the barber's cloth that was draped over him. He simply threw it back over one shoulder, to clear his guns, and stepped out into the street.

"Honk," he called softly. "Honk Hale. Turn around."

The halfwit turned, and Lonny looked fully into the feverish, empty-bright eyes he had sought so long. Lonny stopped and stood flexed, eyes holding the madman's, while one of his hands signed to the cornered youth to make off.

"You know me, Honk?" he asked gently.

The bright eyes considered him cunningly. "I seen you somewheres. What you want?"

"I'm a Texan," Lonny said, his voice suddenly harsh. "I don't like what you say about Longhorns."

The crafty eyes blanked, then brightened again genially. "You mean you want to draw with me?"

Lonny nodded shortly. "I want to draw with you."

The old good humor spread childishly over the whiskered face. "That's fine," Honk nodded. "I can't never get nobody to draw with me."

He returned his pistols to their leather, and stood smiling in rapt enjoyment and anticipation.

"Go ahead, when you're ready," he mouthed, still grinning.

Lonny shook his head, unable to take that advantage over the foe he had sought so long. There would be little enough satisfaction in this if he gave the halfwit every advantage.

"You go first, Honk," he said in a hoarse whisper. "You get first bite. First—and it'll be your last, Honk. Reach when you're ready."

He saw the bright eyes go glazed and distant, saw the squat body tense. And he stood tense himself, every nerve and muscle attuned to one demand, one desire—one skill, for which they had been schooled constantly for three years.

He believed he could outdraw the halfwit. For one thing, he had selected short-barreled guns, while Honk's were long. For another, he had trained himself especially at the draw. For yet another, he had willed himself to win, and there was no will in the madman's makeup. There was only a kind of blind, machine-like function. And that was not enough to match Lonny Beal's soul-consuming obsession.

Lonny had believed right. Dish Face made the first move. But Dish Face's two long-barreled pistols had barely cleared leather when Lonny's guns erupted, blasting the noonday silence with two shots that were almost one.

Honk Hale's guns rattled upon the planks at his feet, one of them going off, the bullet ploughing harmlessly into one of the saloon's clapboards. Honk himself stood swaying and white of face, staring down with hurt, dazed eyes at his mangled hands. Hands whose flesh was torn, white and bloodless yet, with shattered bone ends sticking through.

Lonny was looking at those hands, also. He was seeing that neither would ever hold another gun. But Lonny wasn't finished. He had envisioned the outcome of this encounter too many times in the past to stay himself now. He hadn't planned, a moment earlier, to carry it any farther. But, for the first time in all his many fights, the sight and smell of blood, mingled with the smell of gunsmoke, carried him away.

He advanced slowly on his crippled opponent—driven by an impulsion as blind and unreasoning as the one which had driven Honk Hale. The darkness was on his brain again. His face was a mask of fury, his voice a rasp that pained his throat.

"You damned, hog-brained, bullying, dish-faced devil! Look at what you've did to me. Look at my ears. Look at my hands. You made me what I am. And that's your funeral. I've looked for you for three years. I promised myself I'd notch your ears, the way you done mine. I swore I'd kill you, and wear your ears on my watch chain. Now I'm going to do it!"

Honk Hale had backed away from him, step by step, as he advanced. Now he stood with his back against the saloon front, identically as the unarmed youth had stood a minute earlier, staring at death with cloudy eyes.

Lonny had halted, and slowly raised his guns again. There was a red film over his eyes. He didn't see Double-A Hale and his daughter, on their feet again, standing side by side in the road, watching a murder with stunned horror in their eyes, not interfering, knowing the futility of attempted interference. He saw only the hated face with its huge flaring ears.

He hadn't noticed before that the ears were big. Now they looked big as elephant ears. He could hit them from the hip from fifty yards away . . .

PERHAPS it was the realization of how easy it was that brought him to his senses—reminded him that the cornered enemy was only a moron, after all. A crippled moron, at that. He had one big ear in his pistol sights, and the gun hammer was back at cock. He stood for what seemed a long time, motionless and rigid, as if waiting for something to happen.

Finally, a tremor went through him, shaking the guns in his hands, rattling the teeth in his mouth. He lowered the guns and turned. He saw the ranchman and the girl standing there, watching him in fear and fascination.

"Take care of him," he said in a burned-out voice. "He's all right, now. He won't never hurt anybody again."

Then, while they still watched, unaware that they were watching, he dropped his guns into the dust just off the sidewalk. Next, he unbuckled the gunbelts and let them fall beside the guns. His gloves followed guns and belts. Lastly, he ripped off the barber's cloth, dropped it upon the rest of the paraphernalia of a life he had finished with, then turned and walked away from them forever.

He went into the saloon, not the barbershop where the haircut still awaited him. Alone in the place, except for the staring bartender, he put his head down on the counter, and sobbed . . .

Later, when he'd come out of it a bit, he ordered a drink. The thought occurred to him as he tasted it that it was his first drink in more than three years. Always before, in those three years, he had needed clear vision and good reflexes—had not dared to take a drink.

The thought that all this was behind him now eased the tension inside him, and he straightened suddenly, like a man who has just shed a heavy burden. He looked at himself in the glass, and the face he saw was remarkably like the face that had looked back at him out of another bar mirror, down in Ogallala, all those years ago.

Still later, he left the saloon, intending to look up the Texans to arrange transportation back in their company. Back to the Pecos and a life he could now return to, at peace with himself and the world at last.

In the doorway, he met Hale and his daughter. Sight of them reminded him of a duty still undischarged, here in the north country that had used him so harshly.

"I was just going to look you up, Double-A," he lied in a voice that was changed as he himself was changed. "I was wondering if you had found that man you wanted, to ramrod Hoe."

"I found him, Lonny," the ranchman nodded. "Out on the sidewalk about ten minutes ago. I'm looking at him, right now."

Lonny had to look from the old man to his daughter and back before he understood for certain what was meant. But, having looked, he began to understand. Much more even than had been put into words.

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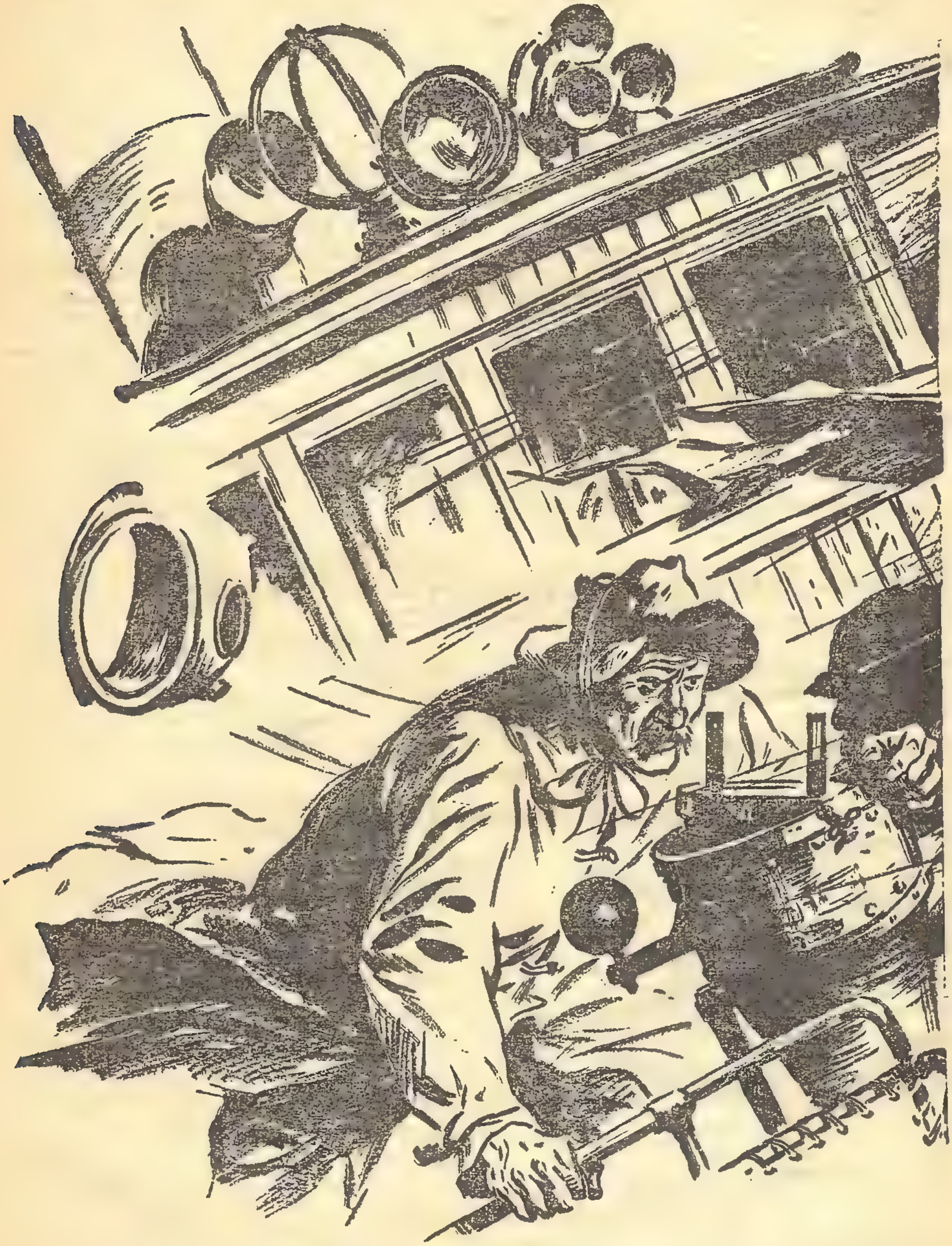
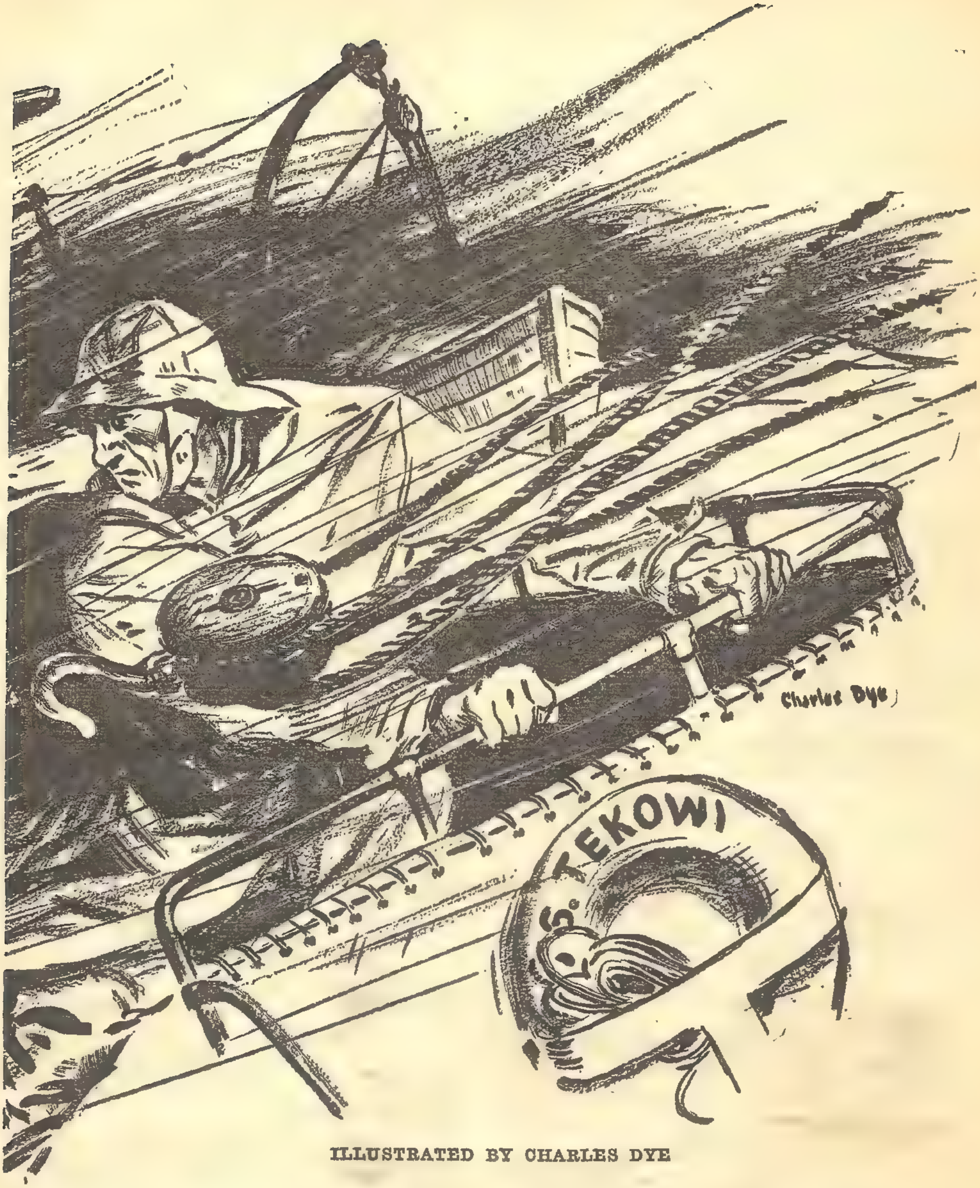


Captain Swinsby lifted the heavy brass cover from the binnacle and I saw the wind tear it from his grasp and fling it far out to leeward, like a child's balloon.

By STANDBY



ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

HIS name was Swinsby. Not a very imposing name, but then there was nothing imposing about the man. He was short and thin, almost frail looking, with pale blue, watery eyes and a habit of carrying his shoulders hunched forward so that he looked slightly deformed. His hair, what little there was of it, was gray and always untidy.

I first met him when I joined the old *Tekowi* as mate. She was no crack liner, that old ship—only a small, coal-burning coaster on the Brisbane-Darwin run—but I boarded her feeling well pleased with myself. Small as she was, she spelt promotion for me, a step-up from second to first mate. I didn't feel so pleased when I met her master, Captain Swinsby.

He was pacing up and down outside his cabin, a small, unprepossessing, hunched-up old man. His white uniform was wrinkled and ill-fitting, on his head was an old felt hat and his bare feet were thrust into heedless leather slippers that flip-flapped on the deck as he walked.

I introduced myself, though I'd never have believed he was the master had it not been for the four-barred epaulettes on his shoulders. Later I learned that he detested uniforms and only wore them because the Company insisted. The uniform was a concession to the owners, the felt hat and the slippers an assertion of his own tastes.

"Mead?" he said, pausing in his walk to glance incuriously at me. "Oh, yes. You're the new mate. You'll find Mr. Matson, the second mate, up for'ard. He'll show you around. Been with the ship ever since she was launched."

He resumed his flip-flap pacing and I turned away in disgust. His off-handed passing over of me to the second mate was so much on a par with his general appearance that I wondered how anyone could have been foolish enough to entrust him with a command.

Matson, I discovered, was a stolid, thickset individual who certainly looked as if he'd been with the ship since she was launched. I judged him to be approaching his sixties. Utterly lacking in imagination or ambition he was one of those men who are content to end their days as second mates, always shirking the responsibilities that promotion brings.

DURING the next few weeks I saw nothing that altered my first impressions of Captain Swinsby. He seldom spoke, even to Matson who had been shipmates with him for years, and I never heard him give a definite order. Sometimes when I was on watch he came up to the bridge, but he didn't interfere, just walked slowly up and down with his wretched slippers going flip-flap along the deck. Usually I cursed him under my breath for getting in my way for he always arriving when I was particularly busy taking bearings and plotting the ship's position, when we were skirting a reef or making a turn in the narrow Torres Strait waters. When we were in clear, open water and I had time on my hands I saw nothing of him. Being young and full of my own sense of importance in those days it never occurred to me that his visits could be timed to coincide with the danger points. You see, he was so disinterested, so ineffectual. He didn't give orders or even advice, he didn't take bearings or enter the chartroom to check the ship's position, just flip-flapped up and down with his hands thrust into his pockets and his shoulders hunched forward like a pensive old vulture. And then, when I found time to relax a little, he'd disappear down the ladder.

Once, when we were approaching a submerged danger marked on the charts as Dugdale Rock, I came down from the standard compass to find him standing on the lower bridge. There isn't much sea room in that particular spot. To avoid hitting the rock a careful bearing must be maintained on Chapman Island light. The Old Man wasn't even looking at the distant steel light tower, he was staring up at two squabbling seagulls fighting noisily for possession of the truck of our foremast.

"You'd think there wasn't room for the two of 'em up there, the way they squabble," he remarked, turning his watery blue eyes on me. They fascinated me, those eyes. Always seemed to be on the point of brimming over and yet they never quite did. He moved away without waiting for an answer but after a few steps he turned. "Nasty rock, that Dugdale Rock, mister," he said in the same disinterested tone. "Never shows. A very easy rock to hit."

I said, "Yes, sir. I was keeping well clear of it." But his slippers were already flapping down the ladder.

Things went on like that for three or four voyages. In my private opinion it would have made no difference to the ship if Captain Swinsby had stayed ashore. He was simply there to comply with a regulation that every ship must carry a qualified master. Certainly he always took the *Tekowi* in and out of port. I had to admit that he did it quite well but it wasn't a difficult job. She was a good ship to handle and I flattered myself that I could have done it just as well or better.

As the *Tekowi* only carried two mates the Old Man always stood the morning eight-to-twelve watch, but apart from that I don't know how he put in the time. On one occasion I got an insight into what must have been his only hobby. We had to land a survey party on a lonely stretch of the coast. A study of the chart showed that we would have to anchor two miles offshore and then use one of the boats. A small tidal inlet seemed to offer the best landing place. I showed Matson its position on the chart and said, "You'd better study this carefully, Second. You'll be in charge of the boat."

"Did the Old Man say so?" he asked, looking a bit surprised.

"No," I snapped. "I said so." I don't know how it was but without ever alluding to my age these two old fellows always made me feel like a mere schoolboy or at best a first year apprentice.

"I think you'll find the Old Man's taking 'er in himself," Matson ventured mildly. "He ain't ever been ashore in this particular spot and he's a bit of a crank for pokin' into strange places. Hardly a creek on this coast he ain't been into at some time or another."

He was right, of course; he knew the Old Man a lot better than I did. Captain Swinsby took charge of the boat as if it was a perfectly natural thing for the master to be taking over the junior officer's job.

I didn't even remark on the strangeness of his behavior. Already I'd come to a very satisfactory conclusion about my appointment to the *Tekowi*. Swinsby was a back number, a has-been, though I doubted if he had ever been much good. As a figurehead or at everyday routine stuff he might be right enough but in an emergency, in a situation calling for real seamanship and initiative, he'd be absolutely hopeless. Knowing this the Company had looked around for a smart, up-and-coming young officer to take his place. And I was the man. You see, I was very young and too ignorant to have even the beginnings of an inferiority complex in those days. It never occurred to me that I could have been put there to learn something from a man who knew more about the sea than I would ever know.

The emergency, the test of seamanship, came on our next trip south. Trouble leaped on us out of the darkness of the night as we were threading our way through the narrow, reef-infested inner route between Thursday Island and Cooktown.

Few stretches of navigable water in the world are so confined, so hemmed in by hidden reefs and shoals as this Inner Passage. Countless small islands dot the course but they are so small, so low-lying, that they are more in the nature of menaces than aids to navigation. There is, perhaps, one favorable thing about this route. The outer reefs of the Great Barrier break up the ocean swell so that inside it is usually as calm as the proverbial millpond.

It was calm enough when I handed over the watch to Matson at midnight, though a southerly breeze was springing up and there was a definite cloud bank on the southern horizon. The barometer, too, was low for that time of the year, but I

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had no thought of cyclones as I entered the reading in the log. The cyclone season on the Queensland coast usually extends from late December to March and this was the first week in November. I nearly bumped into Captain Swinsby as I stepped out of the chartroom.

I was wondering why he was on the bridge at midnight on a clear, starry night when he said, "What's the glass doing, mister?"

I told him the reading and he nodded.

"We're in for a bad blow," he said. "There's a cyclone not far off. You'd better get some sleep while you can, mister. I'll stay here."

Smiling condescendingly in the darkness I said, "Yes, sir," and went below. If he chose to spend the night on the bridge that was his affair. As for me, I had four hours' sleep coming to me and I wasn't going to waste one minute of them.

FOR once I awoke without being called, roused from a deep sleep by a steady drumming roar. Obviously the ship was being driven hard, for the engines were going faster than I had ever heard them turn, revving till their vibrations rattled the cabin bulkhead. But it wasn't only the engines. Another noise was coming from outside. I stepped out on deck and discovered the cause of it. It was wind—wind that struck me like a blow from some huge padded fist, forcing me aft till I was literally running backwards along the deck. I grabbed frantically at a stanchion and brought myself up with a jerk that nearly tore my arms out of their sockets. Rain was driving horizontally along the deck, lashing my body painfully through my thin pajamas. Clawing from one hand hold to another I struggled back to my cabin. I dressed hurriedly, pulling sea boots, oilskin and sou-wester over shirt and trousers. The time, I noticed, was three thirty.

Captain Swinsby and the second mate were both on the bridge when I arrived. Rain was crashing against the heavy plate glass of the bridge windows and the whole bridge structure was vibrating under the wind pressure. The roar of the heavier gusts made speech difficult even in this well protected enclosure. If you had anything to say you waited for a lull. Just abaft our beam and very close to us I could see the wet blur of a blinking light—feeble, watery streaks in the blackness of the night. Four quick flashes I counted and recognized it as the light on Waterwitch Reef.

Edging close to the Old Man I said, "My God, skipper, it's blowing!"

He treated that fatuous remark with the silence it deserved and moved away to caution the helmsman about his steering.

There was something strange about his appearance but I couldn't think what it was until he bent over the lighted binnacle. The light glistened on his wet oilskin but it was his headgear that really attracted my attention. He was wearing his felt hat lashed down with several lengths of spunyarn tied under his chin in a huge bow. The general effect was ridiculously like an old-fashioned poke bonnet. It would have been laughable had I been in the mood for laughter. But I wasn't.

Quite apart from the gale—which God knows was bad enough—we were groping our way blindly through a maze of reefs. On our port hand lay the imperfectly charted labyrinth of coral that goes to make up the Great Barrier, to starboard were shoals and foul ground. Directly ahead of us lay Bow Reef, a small outcrop of coral marked with a black square beacon. Normally we would alter course as we approached it and pass half a mile off the beacon. On a clear night the turn could easily be made by a bearing on Waterwitch Light, but tonight Waterwitch would be no help to us; already the rain was obscuring its quick flashes.

To put it mildly it was a dangerous situation, one that I felt should never have arisen. A prudent, competent master would have anchored in the lee of Waterwitch Reef. But we were barging blindly into the teeth of the worst gale I had ever experienced and instead of a competent master the ship and the lives of all in her were in the hands of this absurd, ineffectual little old man in a poke bonnet!

Hoping to make him realize the gravity of the situation I moved across and asked him what he intended to do.

"Eh?" he said, glancing up from the lighted compass card. "Do? Oh, keep on. It's the only thing we can do. We're only making five knots so we should pick up Bow Reef beacon in daylight."

Five knots! Little more than half our normal speed in spite of the increased engine revolutions! There was a big sea running. We were bucking into a short steep chop and, because our holds were almost empty, were pounding a little. Certainly that pounding could take a knot or so off our speed but it wouldn't reduce it to five knots. It could only be the terrific wind pressure on our high superstructure that was holding us back.

"Do you think we'll ever pick up the beacon, sir?" I asked. "Even in daylight, with this rain?"

"Oh yes," he said. "It's only coming in squalls at present. It's come on very suddenly. Don't ever remember seeing a bad blow come with so little warning but with any luck the worst of it won't come for a few hours."

I was going to ask him what he intended doing if it *did* get worse, but he moved away and spoke to the second mate. Something about standing by, he said. Anyhow Matson did not go off for his watch below. I don't know what good his presence did. For an hour and a half we didn't see a thing except the faint, wet halo around our masthead light and the dim shape of our foc'sle head. Occasionally we caught a gleam of white as a wave curled over in a burst of phosphorescence. When the heavy rain squalls hit us even these nearby things were hidden.

Daylight found us pounding along against driving rain and a wind that was rising in great whooping gusts. A careful check of the log showed that our speed had dropped to four knots. Half an hour later we picked up Bow Reef beacon, a faint square shape rearing itself out of a welter of dirty foam where the breakers swirled across the reef. We were due to alter course again here so as to pass a mile and a half off Ellis Island but instead the Old Man ordered me to run off a course straight for the island.

Inwardly I said, "Thank God. He's going to anchor in the lee of Ellis." It was obvious that we couldn't keep up this blind groping for landmarks in the ever worsening visibility. Sooner or later we would miscalculate our leeway and pile up on a reef. To add to our worries the tide was at three quarter flood, allowing what must have been a tremendous ocean swell to surge over the outer reefs in a confused, broken sea. The old *Tekowi* was thumping her nose into it and flinging sheets of spray clear over her bridge. Admittedly Ellis Island was far from being an ideal anchorage but it was a case of "any port in a storm."

* * *

THE MAN who marked Ellis on the chart as an island must have had a sense of humor for it is nothing but a narrow sand strip less than half a mile long and a tenth of a mile wide. The highest point of it is only six feet above high water. A few stunted bushes grow on the summit but by far the most outstanding feature of the "island" is the big black square beacon standing a full twenty feet above the tallest bush.

Approaching Ellis from the northwest as we were, the island is steep-to but on the south and eastern sides a coral reef extends for over two miles. Even at high water, when the reef would be covered, I felt it would offer us some measure of protection from the force of the sea. And by heaven we'd be in need of protection if things got any worse! Since daylight the wind had shifted steadily to the eastward, a sure sign that they would.

"You'll be anchoring in the lee of Ellis Island, I suppose, sir," I said to the Old Man.

He smiled at me and from under the brim of his absurd poke bonnet his blue, watery eyes regarded me with something like pity.

"No, mister," he answered. "I won't." He nodded towards the chartroom. "Come in here and I'll show you what I intend to do." Bending over the chart he picked up the dividers and indicated a tiny inlet on the coast almost opposite Ellis. "Do you see this place? I'm taking the ship in there."

I examined the locality closely. The chart showed shallows extending two miles offshore. It showed outlying reefs and a shaded section indicated that the mouth of the inlet dried at low water.

"But, my God, Skipper!" I exclaimed. "You couldn't get the ship in there! There isn't enough water to get within a mile of the place. Besides, we don't know anything about it, the extent of these reefs or anything."

"*I* do," he answered. "I took a boat in there once, nearly five years ago. It's a snug little anchorage once you get inside."

Once you get inside! That was just it. It was one thing to take a ship's lifeboat in there in fine weather but quite another to take a steamer in through those shallows in a howling gale and blinding rain-squalls. Even if he could see landmarks how could any man memorize what he'd only seen once, and that five years ago?

The Old Man must have read my thoughts for he smiled and said, "My memory isn't failing yet, young fellow." He tapped the back of my hand with the dividers. "I'm going to tell you a few things, for your own good. You're young and ambitious. With a few hard knocks and a bit of experience you should make a good seaman. Never forget this: Our job is ninety-eight per cent routine but if we ever lose sight of that other two per cent it's time we swallowed the anchor because, sooner or later, we'll find ourselves called on to make a big decision, one where no previous experience or book of rules can help us. When that time comes we can only weigh the facts carefully, make a decision and stick to it."

He emphasized the point by bringing his fist down with a bang on the chart table. I looked into his face and quite suddenly I saw a side of Captain Swinsby I'd never seen before. His blue eyes were just as watery as ever but behind the moisture they were hard, hard and unwavering. And his jaw! Strange that I'd never noticed that jaw before. It jutted forward aggressively, compressing his mouth in a thin, hard line. There was no wavering or indecision in that face. Captain Swinsby had weighed his facts, made his decision and, come hell or high water, he'd stick to it. Nothing that I could say would make the slightest difference.

"Ellis Island would never save us from the blow that's coming," he went on quietly. "There's a lot worse to come. If we stay out here and try to battle it out we won't stand a chance. We've got no sea room. Both anchors and a full head of steam wouldn't keep us from drifting on to the reefs. In the next few hours you're going to see a blow that will tax your powers of comprehension." He stated the facts as calmly as if he'd been announcing his intention of going down to breakfast. "In another hour it will be high water. We're approaching spring tides which means we'll have an extra nine feet of water over those shallows. We're drawing eight foot six aft so we've got a fair margin of safety. The worst feature of the lot is the visibility, but I'm counting on a few breaks in the rain."

"And if we don't get the breaks, sir?" I couldn't help asking.

"If we don't," he said, "it's quite possible that I'll pile the old girl up on a reef, rip the bottom clean out of her." The corners of his mouth twitched upwards in a lop-sided, whimsical grin. "You're young and strong. You might get ashore. And then, if you're picked up, you can tell 'em that that old fool Swinsby drove his ship onto a lee shore in spite of your advice to anchor at Ellis."

We stepped out on to the bridge and I couldn't help wondering how we'd ever pick up Ellis Island in that gray waste of tumbled sea and driving rain. I had the impression that we weren't making any headway, were just pile driving up and down in the one place while the tortured sea slid past underneath us and dirty, ragged clouds streamed overhead. Actually it took us an hour to do the three and a half miles from Bow Reef.

At 6:15 we sighted Ellis Island. Perhaps that is not quite correct for the seas were breaking clean over the tops of the bushes. We had an occasional glimpse of what might have been bushes among the breakers but we *did* see the black square beacon, a vague, strangely unfamiliar mark that leaned crazily over under the terrific wind. That beacon was set in concrete, stayed at the four corners with heavy cables but even as we stared at it it collapsed and vanished in a sheet of flying spray. And with it went any illusions I had about Ellis Island as a possible anchorage.

Captain Swinsby brought the ship

around at once and steadied her on a course of south seventy west. With wind and sea now abaft the beam, the *Tekowi's* pounding changed to a sharp wallowing motion. The wind pressure kept her heeled over to starb'd but at last she was really moving. Compared with our plodding progress she went fairly roaring along.

Six miles to go! Six miles to what, I wondered. To safety or to certain destruction? The odds, I felt, were too heavy against us. I thought longingly of my life jacket. It was down in my cabin but I was hanged if I'd ask permission to get it while that wizened-up, watery-eyed little old man went without one. I glanced from my own sea-booted feet to his and I'm blowed if he wasn't still wearing his slippers!

Several times since then I have been asked what I would have done if I'd been in charge of the ship. The answer is, I don't know, except that I would have tried to battle it out with the gale, comforting myself with the thought that if I lost the ship it would be through an act of God and not through my own deliberate driving her on to a treacherous lee shore.

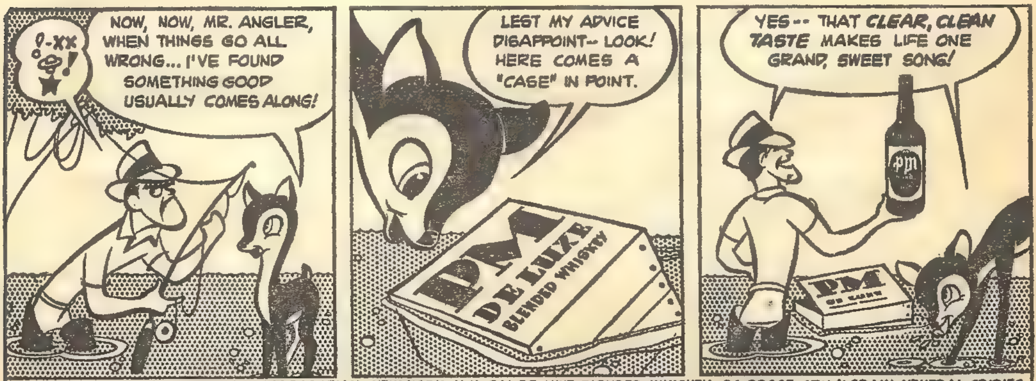
Captain Swinsby called the second mate over. "Go for'ard and rouse Chips," he said. "Clear both anchors. You won't hear anything but keep your eyes on me. When I hold up a hand let go. Don't try to check your cables. Let 'em run till I show a hand again. And both of you watch out you don't get blown overboard. Understand? You'll be no help to me in the water."

We watched Matson ease himself cautiously down the ladder and then, after ordering the standby seaman to be ready to work the engine room telegraph, the Old Man turned to me.

"I'm keeping you with me," he explained, "because you might learn something. Matson never will. Besides, you've got better eyesight than he has and we'll need good eyes. Up top with me. And hang on."

HE HEADED for the ladder leading up to the standard compass with me following. I was young and strong but I needed all my strength to claw my way up that ladder. I clung to it as a mountaineer might cling to a projection on the face of a perpendicular cliff, feeling that if the wind didn't tear me loose it would at least rip the clothes from my body. And always those wretched slippers were two steps above my clutching hands. Heaven knows how they stayed on his feet, but then Heaven knows how that little old man hauled himself up that ladder. Did I say he was frail? He may have looked it but his muscles must have had the pliant strength of steel hawsers.

If it was a struggle to climb the ladder it was a continuous battle to stay on the exposed platform of "Monkey Island." I had experienced gales before and if I thought of them at all it was as impersonal things, strong winds that pressed against you, forcing you to turn your back and hunch your shoulders for protection. But this wind was nothing like that. It was personal in its savage fury. It battered me, mauling me like an infuriated wrestler



?-XX @!
NOW, NOW, MR. ANGLER, WHEN THINGS GO ALL WRONG... I'VE FOUND SOMETHING GOOD USUALLY COMES ALONG!
LEST MY ADVICE DISAPPOINT-- LOOK! HERE COMES A "CASE" IN POINT.
PM DE LUXE BLENDED WHISKEY
YES -- THAT CLEAR, CLEAN TASTE MAKES LIFE ONE GRAND, SWEET SONG!
PM
PM
NATIONAL DISTILLERS PRODUCTS CORPORATION, NEW YORK, N.Y. PM DE LUXE BLENDED WHISKEY. 86 PROOF. 67½% GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS

seeking to tear his opponent apart limb by limb. I grasped the rail with both hands, half expecting it to rip out of the deck and go hurtling over the side with me still clinging frantically to it. Captain Swinsby practically wrapped himself around the standard compass, crouching over it so that he looked as much a part of it as a shellfish glued to its rock. Speech, of course, was impossible. To open one's mouth facing the wind would have invited instant suffocation. An order or a warning shouted downwind would have been torn to pieces as it left the lips, drowned in the roar of the gale that was like the continuous roll of thunder occasionally rising to a wailing shriek as the wind split itself on the funnel stays just behind us.

The violence of it combined with the lashing rain was numbing my very brain and depriving me of the power to think. As a ship's officer I was useless, as a spectator I could see a waste of confused and broken gray water, tattered gray clouds that raced past just above our masthead, and all around us, completely isolating us and blotting out all trace of the land ahead was a curtain of lashing rain.

I don't know how long I clung there before realizing we were in the shallows. I could feel it in the jerky movements of the ship as if she sensed the bottom close under her keel and was shying away from the danger. Danger! It was below us and all around us. The sea was a dirty brown, discolored by churned-up sand. Directly ahead of us, and so close that I could see the ugly black niggerheads of dead coral half bared in the troughs of the waves, was a reef.

I tried to shout aloud then. The effort was quite useless, of course, but the Old Man had already seen the danger. His mouth was pressed into the speaking tube and the ship's head was swinging in obedience to his order.

Our first glimpse of land was as faint and shadowy as a motion picture projected onto a screen in broad daylight, yet I judged it to be somewhat less than half a mile away.

Through rain we glimpsed dim outlines of breakers crashing against a stretch of low coast, a bold tree-clad point and, just to leeward of the point, a narrow inlet, the bar across its entrance a smother of dirty yellow foam.

Captain Swinsby lifted the heavy brass cover from the binnacle and I saw the wind tear it from his grasp and fling it far out to leeward. That cover must have weighed ten pounds yet it sailed away like a child's toy balloon.

The Old Man wasn't worrying about its loss; he was taking a bearing on the inlet, an unnecessary precaution as it turned out, for we never lost sight of the opening.

Only a few minutes after we sighted the bar we were on it, really on it, for the old ship thumped down with a jar that fairly rattled her. The next wave lifted her and she dragged herself over. We were in deeper water then with the inlet swinging in behind the high point to form a small landlocked anchorage.

The *Tekowi* made the turn grudgingly, drifting broadside-on as she brought the wind on her beam. To me it was obvious that she could never fight her way around sufficiently to face that wind. I was wondering why the Old Man didn't give the order to let go the anchors before we were blown ashore, when I saw the cables racing silently over the revolving windlass. Who ever heard of ship's cables going down silently? Yet of all the clattering roar they must have been making not the faintest sound reached us. Along the point, trees were bowed almost to the ground, writhing in agony as great limbs were torn from them and tossed across the anchorage like the merest feathers before the gale.

I felt the ship lurch heavily and then straighten up on an even keel. Matson and Chips were screwing up the windlass brakes, I saw, but it wasn't the anchors that had brought her up. She wasn't facing up to them properly. The only other explanation was that we'd run aground. The Old Man was already dragging himself towards the ladder and I wasted no time in following him. Aground or afloat I felt that any longer on that exposed platform and I'd be battered unconscious by the wind.

In the comparative shelter of the lower bridge I struggled to regain my breath and at the same time announce my discovery.

"Skipper," I gasped. "We're aground."

He stood there with one hand on the telegraph, this quaint-looking, little old man. Rain dripped from his absurd headgear and trickled down his leathery old face.

"I hope so," he said.

The telegraph was at "Stop." He jerked the handle to and fro several times and left the indicator at "Finished with Engines."

"It's a good blue mud bottom in here," he added. "That should hold her."

It did. The Old Man had run her aground on a falling tide and she sat there undamaged through a cyclone that tore houses from their foundations, sunk nearly half the pearling fleet and piled a ten thousand ton freighter high up on a reef. We had to wait three days for a tide big enough to float us off, but what was three days' delay and the loss of one binnacle cover in one of the worst gales ever seen on that coast?

It was while we were viewing the utter desolation of up-rooted trees and twisted, leafless trunks left behind by the cyclone that Captain Swinsby remarked, "Quite a blow, wasn't it?"

"I'd never have believed such a wind was possible," I admitted.

"Do you think you learned anything from the experience?"

"Yes, sir," I said slowly. "I learned a hell of a lot."

I didn't tell him but, judging from the look of amusement in those watery blue eyes, I think he guessed that the one big lesson I had learned was never to judge a man by his looks.

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GLUTTON FEVER

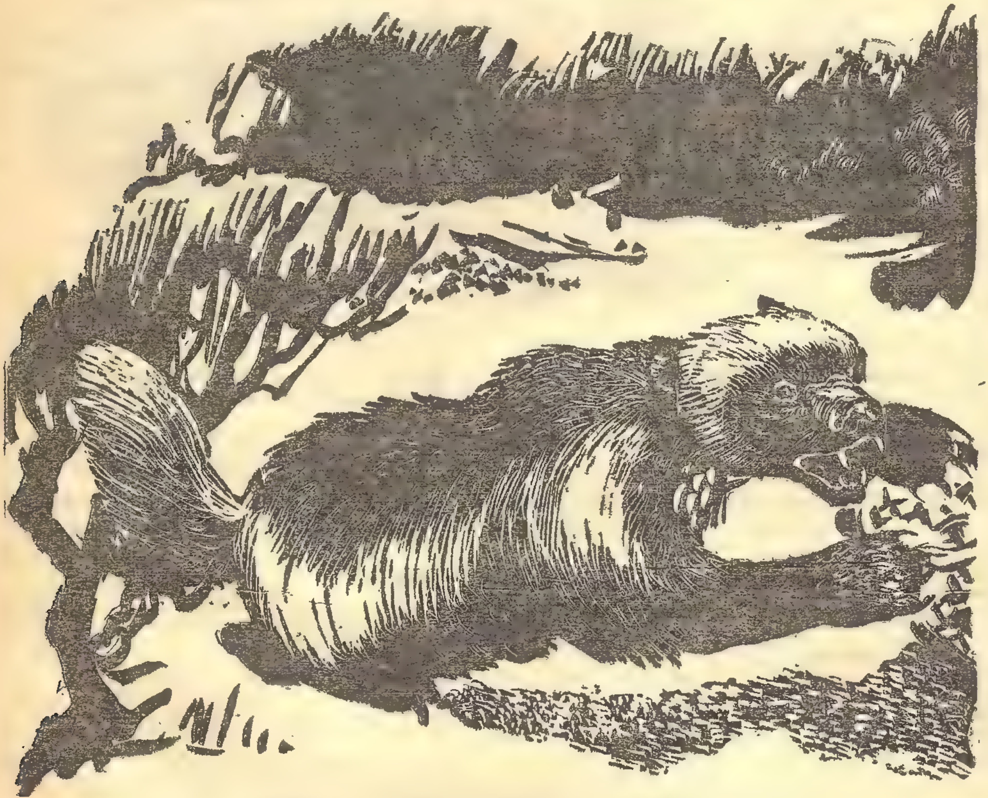
BY

ROBERT L. TRIMNELL

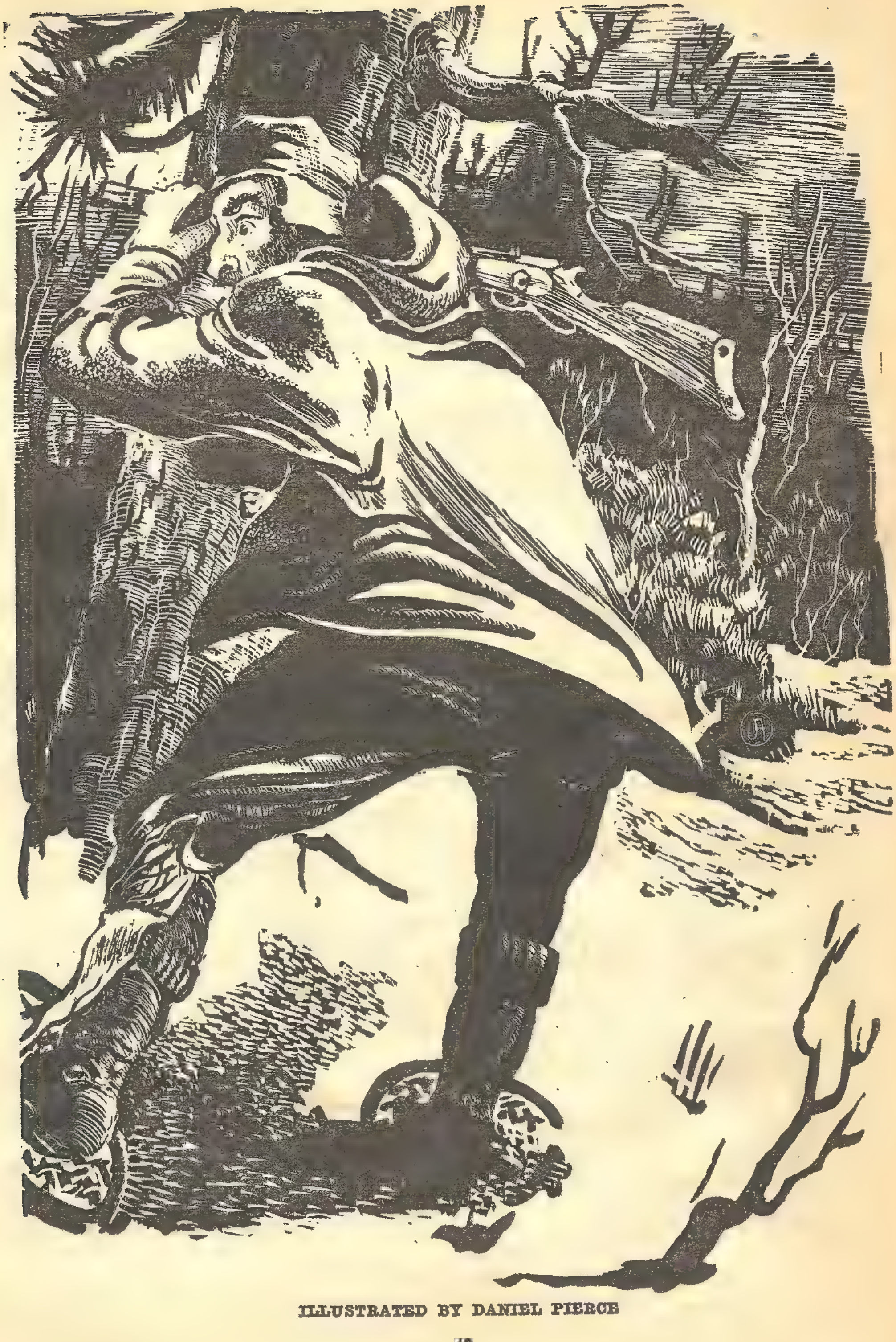
JIM BERRY used a snowshoe to scrape crusted snow over the fire. It was an act of long habit, rather than to prevent fire spreading in the chalk-white land of gnarled pinons and bleak rock. He took a last drag from his cigarette, ground it into the snow and glanced at Slim McCrears, his partner. Slim was snuggling the pack board against his back, strapping it tight. He sucked on his pipe and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"So I tells this lieutenant," Slim said. "I says, 'Lieutenant, sir, if you think I figure to take my troop out in them cactus flats with Santa Anna's sharpshooters runnin' two to a nopal leaf, why you just been standin' in the sun too long.' "

They both stepped into their snowshoes, adjusted the pack boards, and slogged off toward a willow thicket in a gully below. Jim half-listened to the older man's story. He had enjoyed it at the first telling, some four months before. Now he found himself concentrating on things like the bare black rock ahead that they had to go around carefully because the drift snow might not hold their snowshoes. He found himself spending five minutes in wonder-



With a savage growl, a blackish-brown animal scuttled out of the brush and flung itself at the trapper's leg.



ILLUSTRATED BY DANIEL PIERCE

ing if that haze ahead was a snow flurry or just a stray whip of wind. He snuggled down into his fur mackinaw collar and Slim's voice was just another gust of wind banging through the high country. The glare of the snow dulled his mind and killed everything but the hope that breakup would come in another month and they would pack the marten hides and mush down to Fort Durnam. He noticed that Slim had stopped talking. That was his cue.

"So what did the lieutenant say?" He tried to make his voice sound interested. Maybe it wasn't necessary. McCrears had projected his mind to the sun-baked borderland of the Mexican war. Jim Berry glanced up at his partner's face. Slim was a rawboned man with a long hound-dog face well-shrouded by a stringy gray beard. His eyes were fixed on the willows ahead, but in those willows he saw cactus and blazing sun.

"Why," McCrears chortled, "he didn't say nothin'. To me, that is. They let me out of the guardhouse two weeks later. They had to, because Santa Anna decided Villa Hermosa was too purty a little town for the likes of us to stay in. The captain figured he needed every man that could shoot a rifle and I could knock the silver conchas off them high blue Mex hats." He chuckled to himself as they slogged down the hill.

Jim Berry's short legs were hard put to keep up with his partner's long sliding strides. Jim was a small chunky fellow, bright brown eyes peering out from under his cap. He wore a curly red beard. This was the first year that he could wear a beard without shame. The fuzziness was gone this year, and it was almost bristly.

"Reckon there's any marten in the willow set?" he asked Slim. He was not seeking information. There usually was marten in this particular set. But he felt that they had to talk. It was talk that kept winter-bound men from going crazy as rutting elk. At least that was what Jim figured. Sometimes his partner's wagging tongue almost drove him mad. The worst was the drone of Slim's voice as he counted pegs on the cribbage board.

"Tell you what," Slim said. "We'll just take us a look and see!" He chuckled at the sally. Jim scowled.

THEY were into the willows. Slim led, the pack board making him look hunchbacked as he leaned over and shoved through the thicket. Jim ducked his head too and trudged through the crunched snow of his partner's trail. They were through to a little clearing when Slim stopped. He stood there for a moment, staring down at the snow.

Jim puzzled his brow. What the devil was McCrears staring at? He pushed up alongside as the older man squatted down on his haunches. Jim saw that the pinon log deadfall was down and apparently empty. Tracks were scattered about it. And then he saw Slim put his pipe in his mouth, shuck off his mittens and slash a match along his leather pants.

"Slim! You aren't lighting a smoke right next to a set!" Jim slammed a hand out and clutched his partner's arm. He stared into the long face, and saw that Slim's pale gray eyes had lost their luster. They were fixed on a spot in the snow, and Slim lit his pipe with a mechanical motion.

Jim let him go and crouched down by the deadfall. The bait was missing, but there was blood and a few scraps of fur on the bottom of the log. He looked at the prints. There were jackrabbit marks, but they were smothered over by something shaped like a man's foot, but narrow. A cub bear, maybe. He shook his head. Too narrow. They were close together and they went off away from the deadfall, shuffling through the snow like clawed snowshoes.

"Skunk bear," Slim growled. "We're washed up, Jim boy. We've took our last marten from this line. Mister skunk bear has took over. We might's well pack up and head down to Fort Durnam right off."

"Skunk bear?"

"Skunk bear. Carcajou. Injun Devil. Wolverine. Glutton. Whatever you want to call the meanest devil on four feet!" For a moment Slim's eyes lit up with hate and he puffed violently on his pipe. Then the light faded and he stared sullenly at the prints.

Puzzled, Jim built himself a cigarette. Yes, he had heard of wolverine. He had almost doubted their existence because of the cloud of superstition that surrounded them. He had heard of Indians laying curses on their traps to keep the dreaded animals away. Once he had seen a trapper wearing a parka edged with long brownish black fur. The man claimed it was so oily his breath would not freeze on it. That showed, the trapper said, why wolverines never froze to death.

"Jim boy." Slim was still staring at the tracks. "I don't want to sound like a old fool. You know I don't care how many black cats crosses my track. But some folks says the skunk bear has got the soul of a dead trapper in his body. He's come back to haunt all us that still follows the sets."

"Bull!" Jim spat out. Angrily he lit his cigarette and glowered at the older man.

"I ain't said I believe it!" Slim said. "I don't take no stock in what the Injuns do, either, burnin' dog hair and makin' a lot of racket when they find glutton sign. I don't go crossin' myself, either, like the Cajuns do."

"Then what's botherin' you? Let's get started on trappin' for him!"

Slim shook his head. "You can't catch him any more'n you can find where the rainbow ends. He'll rob our traps until we move 'em, and they ain't time to set a new line before spring. He'll bust into our cabin and clean it down to the bark. He don't run fast but he can run for days and he only has to eat four times a month to stay fat. He ain't natural, Jim."

Jim snorted and dragged deep on his cigarette. "Any animal can be trapped. He isn't even big like a painter or bear."

"No, he ain't big." Jim cupped his hands around the bowl of his pipe to warm them. "He ain't no bigger'n a porky. Mebbe a foot and a half high and two long. He's weasel family and weasel mean. He lays a scent like a skunk. He's big and tough and wicked as forty weasel rolled into one. But weasel got no brains. The glutton, he's got—well, dammit, he's got enough brains to have the soul of a dead trapper inside of him!" He pushed to his feet, stood staring angrily at the younger man. He puffed hard on his pipe without noticing that it was burned dry. "We'd best head down to Fort Durnam, Jim," he said quietly.

Jim Berry laughed. "Why you spineless old coot! We're in virgin territory! The marten here never seen a trap before. You talk like there's a ghost in this skunk bear!"

Slim shrugged. "If it was only him robbin' us blind—" He looked at Jim a bit oddly. "That ain't it. The wolverine does somethin' to you here." He poked a thumb at his belly. "He'll drive men to kill each other. You come on to Fort Durnam with me, Jim. This is your first season in the high country. I led you up here, and you ought to take my word for it."

"Go to the devil!" Jim spat out. "I'll trap this little black bugger! I'll do it myself!"

Slim stared at him for a minute. Again his voice was calm, and empty. "I'm goin' back to the cabin. I ought to make it afore night. You swing through the traps and I'll meet you at the cabin tomorrow. Then we can both go to Fort Durnam or we can split the furs." He wriggled into his snowshoes and turned in the direction of the cabin.

"Good luck, Jim," he called over his shoulder. "See you tomorrow."

Jim scowled at his retreating back.

WHEN his partner was gone, Berry inspected the other sets in the willows. The other deadfall was not sprung. A little farther he found the steel trap. A curse slipped out of his lips when he saw it. There was a foot in the trap. He put on his smoked gloves, sprung the trap open. He examined the foot carefully. Lynx. He knew that muskrat often chewed their own legs off to get free; mink sometimes. Lynx, never. Or maybe he'd just never heard of it happening. But as he thought of that, he shook his head. Half-hidden by snow were more of the bear-like tracks.

Angrily, he reset the trap, scattered rabbit entrails around it. He righted the two deadfalls, set them and strewed more entrails around. Then he scuffed his way along to the lower part of the trapline.

He stormed along angrily that afternoon, his short legs chugging through the snow, cursing at every robbed trap, shouting out every dirty or unkind word he knew, until he had mouthed more ugly things than a year would draw from him ordinarily. Toward nightfall he changed. His square face seemed to lengthen, and his short-cropped beard to wilt. The thing had gone beyond a robbing of traps. Two fine steel sets were stolen, the stakes pulled up. Gone. The amazing part was that it seemed to be the same wolverine, for he had spotted a broken toe on the right front paw print.

As dark came on he holed up in a pine thicket, built a quick leanto, and fried some bacon and sourdough. Then he lay under the pine thicket in his bed roll, smoking a cigarette.

His anger was gone, and he began to feel as Slim had looked that day—wilted. It was like fighting a man in a nightmare. And there was a cold chill grooving along his spine. He remembered the stories he had heard of Indians chanting and dancing over wolverine tracks; of Cajuns who crossed themselves when the carcajou was mentioned. He tried to laugh. This was a twenty-five pound member of the weasel family, not a devil!

But even the weariness of a day on snowshoes did not send him immediately to sleep.

There was a light snow falling the next morning. He built a small fire and made his breakfast. He squatted over the fire, eyes narrowed, glancing out in every direction as if expecting to see a squat brown animal scuttle across the snow. Before he set out he checked the clip of shells in his rifle; put one shell in the chamber. Then he buckled on his pack board and slung the rifle over his shoulder.

As he began finding sprung traps, he vacillated between blazing hate and sullen despair. He reset the traps, baited them, put unbaited traps around the baited ones, hoping that the robber wolverine might spring one accidentally while stealing the snared marten. There was one consolation; the thievery had not started until they reached the willows, which left almost a third of the trap line still undiscovered by the glutton.

But it was little enough consolation.

It was nearly dark when he reached the cabin. The winter's supply of firewood, whole trees stacked around it in tepee-fashion, made it into a flat circular mound of snow.

Jim let out his breath in relief. He was bone-weary, although his pack had only a few skins to weight it down. He unslung his rifle, kicked off his snowshoes in the trampled snow in front of the door. He stood them up under the lone window of scraped deerskin. He noticed there were two other pairs of snowshoes sticking up out of the snow. His brow puzzled. One pair belonged to Slim. But the other—there were no such things as visitors when you were on the timberline. Up there, as Slim put it, "Fifty miles from nowhere and hell right over the hill." Jim unslung his pack and pushed through the doorway.

Slim looked up from the table and grunted his greeting. The cribbage board was out, and a wide-backed man was crouched over the table.

"Twenty-one two, twenty-one three—" The man's voice was deep and rumbling; it broke off sharply when the cold air blasted in.

Jim leaned his rifle against the wall and shucked off his fur-edged mackinaw. He went over to the pot-bellied red stove and began rubbing his hands.

"This here's Sam Gregg, Jim boy. Sam, this is my partner, Jim Berry."

Jim shook hands with the man. His own sturdy fist was lost in the other's huge paw. Gregg was a powerfully-built man with a wide face, a flat nose and red-rimmed eyes. His eyes flicked unsteadily over Jim. Those eyes! Jim felt a shiver run up his back. He felt that if he could look into a wolverine's face he would see eyes like that. They were not quite sane, he thought.

"Sam was gluttoned out, Jim boy. He was workin' the Jagger's Hole country, you know, north mebbe thirty mile, with a ol' friend of mine, Orse Wallace. Skunk bear left their cabin lookin' like a cantina after B Troop hit it fresh from the desert. Lucky thing they had the skins in a tree cache. Orse headed off down to Fort Durnam, and Sam here figured best to give Orse what grub they had left, and try to get here. Warn't enough grub for both to go to Fort Durnam. Sam had seen our traps, and he followed them up here to the cabin."

Jim got a boiling-hot cup of coffee from the pot on the back of the stove, and wrapped his hands around it to thaw them out. It was getting dark in the cabin. He watched Sam Gregg's wide face become a mass of black shadows, seeming faintly lit by the red-rimmed eyes.

"Do partners always split when they have skunk-bear trouble?" Jim murmured. He sipped the coffee and watched the faces of the two older men.

Gregg's lips tightened, and he glared at Jim as a grumpy old hound would at a foolish puppy. "It's the best they can hope for," he rumbled.

Slim McCrears refused to meet Jim's eyes. He turned the pack of cards over, shuffled them. He began turning cards. The first one was a three of hearts.

"Damn!" he growled. "Allus said a red three meant bad luck. Turned a red three once when we was marchin' on Monterrey, and two hours later Colonel Grajada, he was one of Santa Anna's handiest officers, he ambushed us." He scratched his left shoulder. "I still got a scar that don't do so good this kind of weather." He raised his head, stroked his beard thoughtfully. Then he got out of his chair, went to the door. He opened it an inch and glanced outside.

"Big snow. Anyways, a quick snow."

"Shut that door!" Sam Gregg snarled.

JIM sipped his coffee as he watched the game resume. He was in deep thought. What was it that made men like this? True, it was near the end of the winter, and their tempers were just as near the breaking point. But after wolverine cleaned out Gregg and his partner they had broken up. Sim McCrears wanted to race off for Fort Durnam. Jim had a lot of respect for the older man, and maybe Slim knew what he was doing. But how could the Injun Devil, a little animal that could be and had been trapped, how could it drive men to such actions?

Jim glanced around the cabin. The stack of stretched furs almost covered the north wall. There was the coffee pot bubbling on the stove, giving off rich brown steam. Slim's rifle hung on the antlers of the deer skull nailed above his bunk.

He thought back to the fall when they built the cabin. They laughed as they notched logs. They talked about what a tight little hole it would be. It had smelled of spruce gum and wet clay. Slim said that would change. It had the odor of smoke and curing hides now. Smells that made home of a trapper's cabin.

"You never seen glutton sign before?" Sam Gregg said to him.

Jim shook his head, still thinking how he and Slim had laughed when a porkypine scrambled out of a fir they felled last fall.

"His first winter out," Slim said. "His pa runs the hardware store down to Fort Durnam. He'd done some mushrat trappin' and that kind of stuff, but this is his first taste o' high country. He's a good rifle shot and he can near outwalk me. He don't do foolish things like touchin' traps with his bare hands and smoking cigarettes around the sets." His voice trailed off at the last words. He glanced furtively at Jim. They both remembered that Slim had lit his pipe as soon as he saw the glutton prints.

Sam Gregg grunted. He fixed his eyes on Jim. "The gluttons got the high country staked out for theirselves. Some day

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they'll be whittled down. They can be caught. But they won't be any marten left then, either. Marten and glutton are dead enemies. But when one's gone they're both gone. A place that's trapped enough to clear out the gluttons ain't got no marten left either."

Gregg's eyes, Jim saw, had switched to his cards. They stayed there, staring in a strange, vacant way. He was talking but he didn't seem to be thinking. He reached a hand up and scratched his neck, where red flannel stuck out of his deerskin shirt. His eyes didn't seem to have any connection with that movement, either.

They fell into silence, as though the final word had been said on gluttons. Jim set his coffee cup down and sat on the edge of his bunk. The smell of hot coffee and hides seemed oppressive. He glanced at the two older men. Mechanically they played their cards. They watched each other's movements carefully, suspiciously. Jim stared at them and wondered. Strange men fell into the profession of trapping. He'd seen some come into Fort Durnam in the spring, roar into the nearest bar and not leave until they were carried out. Some talked to themselves strangely. They would come into his dad's store to talk about what kind of steels they were going to buy that summer. Sometimes Jim's father would talk to them, and their eyes would be staring vacantly at the wall, their minds straying to the snow-swept high country.

Jim's mind switched back to the wolverine. It made him angry. He stood up and paced over to the door. Outside he heard the storm screaming through the trees. He pictured a small dark brown animal scuttling along through the snow. Snarling and chewing his way into the woodpile outside. He thought of Cajuns crossing themselves and retreating from the track that looked like a baby's foot. And of men like Slim and Sam Gregg and Orse Wallace—men like Slim who could follow the lines all day at twenty below zero, then be limber enough to shoot partridge on the wing with his new Winchester repeating rifle. Men like that, abandoning their lines when they saw a print like a baby's foot!

Jim snorted his disgust.

He crawled into his bunk and lay there. The vision kept crossing his mind. A squat little animal scuttling through the snow, a vicious black blot on the white world. He was glad that he was dead tired. It made sleep drug his mind even when that black little animal went scuttling through the white world of his dreams.

The next morning it was dead quiet in the cabin. The deafening kind of quiet that comes when the roar of the storm has passed. There were the heavy snores of Sam Gregg, and Slim's rattling breathing, but the rest was dead silence. Jim put a hand out, felt the frost on his blankets where ice had formed from his breath. He climbed out and started building up a fire from the bed of coals. The one-room cabin was warm when the other two got up, Gregg with his heavy black beard rumpled, Slim facing the world with a glum look on his face.

At breakfast Jim told them his plan. "Six traps under the snow. All of 'em smoked. The ones that's been hangin' out in the firewood for the last week, Slim. I'm going to scatter them and put a spring trap in the center, tied to a tree branch. Whatever takes the spring trap will be hoisted up, and if brother wolverine comes along he'll have to jump for it. He should hit one of the hidden traps while he's floundering around. I'm going to try to put it in a snow drift so he won't be so sure-footed."

The two glowered at him. "I've heard tell of a hundred tricks to catch glutton," Slim said. "Only thing is, none of 'em work. That is, they don't work unless you get a stupid skunk bear. But my guess is, this 'un ain't stupid. He's workin' the trap line, and it takes a smart critter to figger out a trap line."

Sam Gregg made no comment, sat wolfing down the bacon and flapjacks. He made a pool of molasses in the middle of his plate, picked up flapjacks in his big, meaty-fingered hands, rubbed the wheatcake in it and jammed the whole thing in his mouth.

"You think it's foolish to try, Sam?" Jim Berry asked the black-bearded trapper.

The man stared at him silently and went on eating his breakfast. . . .

He made the set in a gully not far from

the cabin, at the near end of the trap line. Nothing he used had been touched by human hands. He worked with the trap between him and the wind so that no man-scent would be blown on them. He bent a willow branch down, tied the bait trap to it, set his stake just tight enough to hold the trap down until the struggles of whatever animal was caught should tear it loose. From the smoked bag he got a handful of rabbit entrails and spread them around the bait trap. Satisfied, he started back toward the cabin. On the way he inspected the traps that lay between him and the cabin. He knew what to expect now. The glutton had the whole line in his possession. Legs and hide from rabbit, lynx and marten were all that remained.

Jim thought he would go crazy that day. The two older men played cribbage, flinging the dirty, battered cards at the pile with nervous ferocity. They growled at each other, and once Sam Gregg jammed a big hand to the knife at his belt. Slim McCrears broke up the game then, went to work taking his share of the skins off the stretching boards, muttering whenever Jim or Gregg came near him.

Jim went to work cutting up wood for the stove. It was his usual release when the cabin walls seemed to close in on him. A man got to feeling that way after days of blizzard, like he had to get outside or he'd go crazy. Always it helped to get out there and drive wedges into the frozen wood, watch it split with a snap that rang clear across the frozen wastes; to swing the axe and see it bite into the wood, feeling the thud up into his shoulders.

He tried that today, and he found that every time he swung the axe he was glancing over his shoulder, as though expecting something. A scuttling little animal? Sam Gregg, scowling at him? Or the pale futile anger in Slim's eyes?

He didn't know. He swung his axe furiously.

THAT night Gregg and McCrears opened a bottle of whiskey, one of the few that Slim kept for thawing out in blizzard weather. It did neither of them any good. They were banging cards on the table and snarling at each other when Jim went to bed.

It must have been past midnight when the voice woke him. It was Gregg, mumbling in his sleep. The voice became clearer.

"Orse, I'll kill yuh, Orse! I don't care!"

Startled, Jim pushed up on his elbows. Across the room, he saw Slim was propped up too, awake and listening.

"That Injun Devil's after us, Orse. Dammit, don't laugh at me like that!" The big man's arm came out of his bedroll, and there was a knife in his hand. He swung it in a wide arc, muttering to himself.

Jim Berry looked over at his partner. They stared at each other for a long time.

Jim didn't sleep well that night.

The next day he approached the traps with fear running icy fingers up and down his spine. He had to catch the glutton! The cabin was smothered with a clammy blanket of glutton fever. Gregg was crazy with it. It made easy-going Slim McCrears snarl when anyone came near him. Jim knew that even though he himself had the springs and cushions of youth, his shoulders would tie up into a rope of knotted muscle and force his head down like an angry bull's.

When he reached the set he stood numb and shaking. He leaned against a pine bole and the muscles corded in his shoulders. He glowered down at the snow. The branch had sprung up; the steel trap dangled from it, and in its jaws was the shredded leg of a rabbit, four feet off the ground. None of the other traps were sprung. The spaces between them were marked by the baby-foot prints. It must have been after the snow stopped, he thought. After dawn.

It was like Slim said. The glutton was "not natural." Jim felt the wind bite into the cold sweat that was coming out on his brow. Suddenly he threw his head back.

"Damn you, glutton!" he howled out. He heard his voice tear thinly into the bite of the wind, and he bellowed it again. "Damn you, glutton!" He shook his fist in the air. After a while he was calm again. He stared at the set and found his mind was very clear. He was going to outwit the little baby-footed animal. It was not a new plan. It was a desperate plan, but a hopeful one.

He took a length of rawhide and tied his rifle to a pine bole. He stuck his knife into the rabbit carcass he was carrying, to kill the man scent on it. Then he cut a long branch with the knife. He notched the branch and jammed the notched end in between the rabbit's ribs. He laid the rabbit among the unsprung traps. Then he tied a piece of rawhide from the branch to the rifle trigger. He put a shell into the chamber, cocked the gun, sighted it carefully at the rabbit and lashed it tight.

He stepped back and surveyed his work. It was thirty feet from the rifle to the bait. Bushes hid the gun from direct view. Even if the wolverine stood over the rabbit and looked around, he would not see the gun. Jim felt a wave of cold pass over him. He was treating the animal like it was human! Assuming that if it saw a rifle muzzle it would not pull at the rabbit—

He turned and hurried away from the set. He found he was pinning his hopes not on the wolverine's being shot; that was too much to hope for. Maybe it would be frightened and step into one of the scattered traps. But did the wolverine know fear? He wondered. He passed a mitten over his eyes, trying to keep from wondering. It was no good to think about it.

When they saw him return without his rifle their mouths went grim.

"Spring-gun set," he told them.

Slim standing in the cabin doorway, looked worried. "Bad medicine, Jim boy." They went inside and sat around the table.

"Where'd yuh set it?" Gregg said. There was a sullen growl to his voice, and heavy sarcasm.

"Due west, in that little gully with the lone pine stickin' out over it. Two mile, maybe."

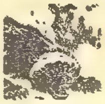
They sat and stared at him. Finally Slim said, "Jim, we're movin' out tomorrow mornin', if the good weather holds up. Sam and me, goin' down to Fort Durnam. We figger we got a good catch already. I've told you, no use fightin' the glutton."

Jim nodded. They had a good catch. Especially Gregg. His enormous pack was full of skins. A good catch for two men. An enormous catch if Orse Wallace had another half as big as this. If— Jim found himself wondering, looking at Sam Gregg's red-rimmed eyes and wondering. Wondering, perhaps, what would happen when Gregg and Slim headed down toward Durnam, if a man could be mad enough to want all the furs, furs he had not even helped trap—

"Slim!" he cried. It came out in a gasp. He didn't mean it. He tried to cover. "Slim, you and Sam wait another day. If my spring-gun set doesn't bring any results by tomorrow, the next day I'll go with you."

Slim nodded. "Good 'nough. I got no faith in it, and spring-gun stuff is bad medicine. But we'll wait another day."

Sam Gregg laughed. "You better stay and play with your spring-gun." He fingered his black beard and glanced toward Slim, a sneer twisting his big lips.



THE next day was clear, with a biting wind whipping past the cabin. Jim got an axe and some fishhooks, with the intention of spending the morning fishing through a hole in the ice of the creek just below the cabin. He planned to go to his set during late afternoon, giving the glutton as much time as possible to take the bait. He left the other two at breakfast. Gregg was more surly than ever. He refused to speak to either of them, shoving food in his mouth with beefy fingers and gulping coffee noisily.

When Jim went outside and stepped into his snowshoes, he felt as though he had come out of a dank cave. The air outside was clear if bitter; he felt good as he slogged down toward the creek. When he got there he began chopping a hole in the ice. Halfway through an axe stroke he paused. From the cabin came a faint voice. A scream, or a yell of anger. A tremor of fear ran through him. Something was wrong back there. He turned toward the cabin. As he did, a looming black figure surged out of the doorway.

Jim stood there with the axe loose in his hand. Gregg got into his snowshoes and slogged down toward the creek. He was carrying his rifle in his right hand, and then Jim saw another rifle, slung over his shoulder. Panic went through him. Two rifles! He stepped into his snowshoes, started uphill toward the man. Gregg saw him. He stopped, raised the rifle to his shoulder. Instinctively Jim threw himself flat on the snow. A rifle bullet shrieked overhead.

He knew why Gregg carried two rifles. One was Slim's, and likely Slim was lying dead at this minute. Gregg's rifle barked again, and snow spat at Jim's side. He looked around, found a willow tangle a few yards away. He crawled over into it, peered out. The rifleman had lowered his weapon, and his eyes scanned the snow. Abruptly he turned to the left, began slogging fast to the west.

"He knows I'll be hard to catch in these willows," Jim thought. And then he realized where Gregg was going. To the spring-gun set! He'd pick up Jim's rifle, and then he would have all the firearms. He could pick Jim off whenever he wanted to, whenever he came near the cabin. And he would have to come near the cabin. An unarmed man could not live in that wilderness, nor could he walk seventy miles to Fort Durnam.

Jim began to move. He had to get to that trap site before the black-bearded man. He smiled briefly to himself. He knew the country and Gregg didn't. He knew a short-cut. He threw the axe away, bent low and plowed forward. He wasn't loaded down with two rifles, as Gregg was. He hurried on, almost running, the snowshoes making loud scuffs on the dry snow, the wind whipping past his head.

There was a ridge he had to cross. He panted up to it, and stopped for a moment. Only a few hundred yards below was the gully, thick with willow growth, and above it, the lone pine. To the left he saw Gregg, shuffling along. Fast, Jim thought. He's moving fast but I'll beat him to that rifle by five minutes.

He started down the ridge. He wondered what he would do when he got the rifle. Shoot Gregg as he came pounding up? Yes. But, God, a man couldn't do that to another man! But Gregg was crazy. Glutton crazy. Jim knew that the enormous pack of furs that Gregg carried was not just his half of the catch. He had killed Orse Wallace. He had killed Slim, and now he was going to be paid for his efforts. Jim was going to shoot him just as if he were a wolverine.

Jim was almost running now, speeding down the hill. He saw Gregg, knew the man hadn't spotted him. Then he knew he shouldn't have glanced away from the trail. The tip of his snowshoe caught a rock, and it held. Jim was thrown violently to the ground.

He scrambled to his feet and a scream of agony tore through his right ankle. He crumpled. It wouldn't support him. He ran his hands over it. No bones seemed to be broken. He tried again. He could do no more than hobble. He moved twenty feet and each step wanted to tear his foot off. Panic gripped him then, and he felt a hoarse croak tear out of his throat.

His ankle was sprained! He could never beat Gregg to the rifle. Here he was, alone, at the mercy of a madman, unarmed. He clutched a pine tree, sobs wrenching his chest. A hundred yards away lay the rifle, down in that little gully. There was an open space between the tree he was clutching and the gully. And now Sam Gregg slogged into sight, looming black against the snow, leaning forward, chugging forward with arms swinging, his bloodshot eyes zipping from side to side. Jim couldn't cross the open space now. Gregg's rifle would stop him.

He heard Gregg laugh as he slogged down into the gully. A loud, hysterical laugh. Jim knew then. He understood glutton fever. Men paired off in cabins and sat out the terrible high-country winter. They played cribbage until the board was a nightmare of little holes. They followed the sets until they were half-crazed by the blinding monotony of the snow. They were inured to all hardships, all monotony. But when a strange little animal scuttled into their lives, they were not ready. They were choked up by monotony and hardship. The delicate springs were gone from their minds. Jim was young and it had only terrified him. Slim was toughened by a dozen climates and a dozen lives, and they left him with the good sense to want to retreat. Cabin fever had worked on Sam Gregg's mind and when the wolverine came it snapped. That was the dread glutton fever.

He saw Sam Gregg plow down into the gully, laughing and shouting. He saw the big man bend down to reach for the rifle, grabbing the barrel in his big hands and yanking it from its lashings.

Then he heard something else. A coarse savage growl. A blackish-brown animal scuttled out of the brush. Heavily furred, a dark jerk of motion against the gleaming snow. It flung itself into the trapper's leg and the snarl stopped as its teeth and claws ripped into flesh. Gregg screamed. He leaped away from it.

The animal was jerked back. Jim saw the rusty chain then, stretching out of the snow to the trap on the animal's hind leg. The glutton had stepped into one of the traps.

Gregg swung his rifle down into the furry black lump of a body. The animal snarled and launched itself at his leg. It wrapped around the leg, tearing and clawing until it looked like a swollen fur boot. Gregg screamed again. He swung his rifle, stumbled and missed. Jim saw that he had lost his snowshoe. He struggled to get his rifle in position to fire, but he could not move. A rusty chain stretched out from his right foot. He too was snared in one of the scattered steels!

The big trapper levered his rifle frantically. At last the rifle barked. The animal's body jerked off Gregg's leg, torn by the force of the shot. Gregg stumbled. Maybe it was the buck of the rifle that did it, Jim thought. Maybe because the man's leg was shredded to the bone. He went down. A scrabbling little mass of bushy brown fur leaped to his head. Gregg screamed. Suddenly his voice vanished, like closing a door on the angry wind. The wolverine still moved, like a muff around the man's face. Then it collapsed into the snow.

It took Jim ten minutes to hobble down to the set. The snow was splattered with blood. Gregg lay with his ripped throat exposed to the cutting wind. The animal was beside him, already stiffening in the cold. Blood had clotted on his furry back where Gregg's bullet had torn through.

SLIM thought he had a word for it. Hands shaking, he explained it to Jim while he sat on the edge of his bunk, Jim dressing the wound in his scalp. It was a bad gash, made when Gregg tried to beat the old trapper to death with his rifle barrel.

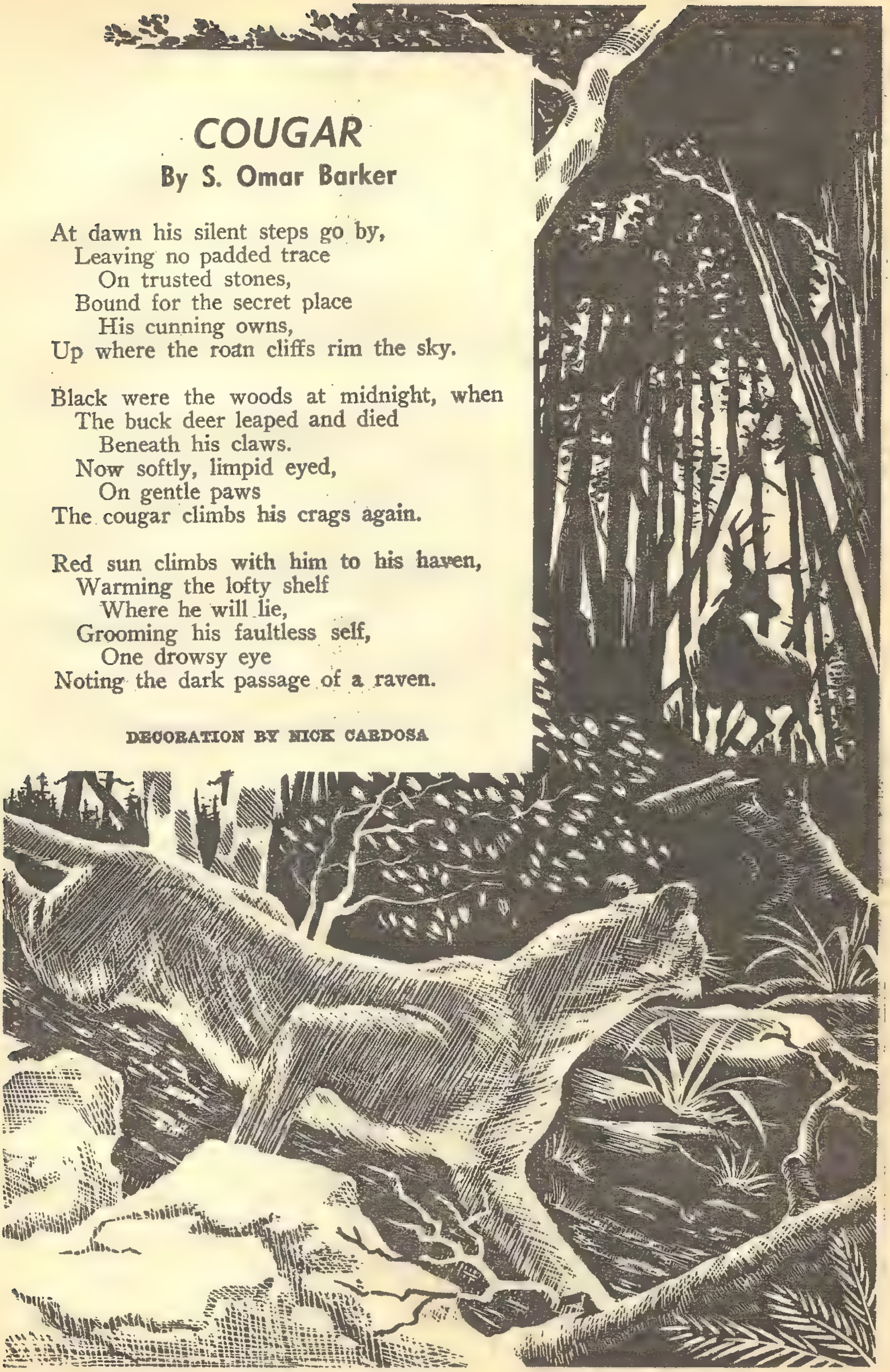
"He was a glutton, Jim. In his heart he was a glutton. Cabin fever just knotted him all up inside, and when he and Orse Wallace got gluttoned out, Gregg just blew up."

Jim was silent. He was too torn up inside from what he had just seen to feel like talking much. He managed to say, "I guess you'll have to handle the trap line while my ankle heals up, Slim."

Slim grinned at him. "Why, that'll be easy. I remember the time when Santa Anna was set to ambush us at a town called—" He stopped. "Hell, you heard that story fifteen times already!"

Jim smiled. "Reckon I have. How much you think marten hides'll be worth this spring, Slim?"

Slim grinned at him and patted the bandage down on his head.



COUGAR

By S. Omar Barker

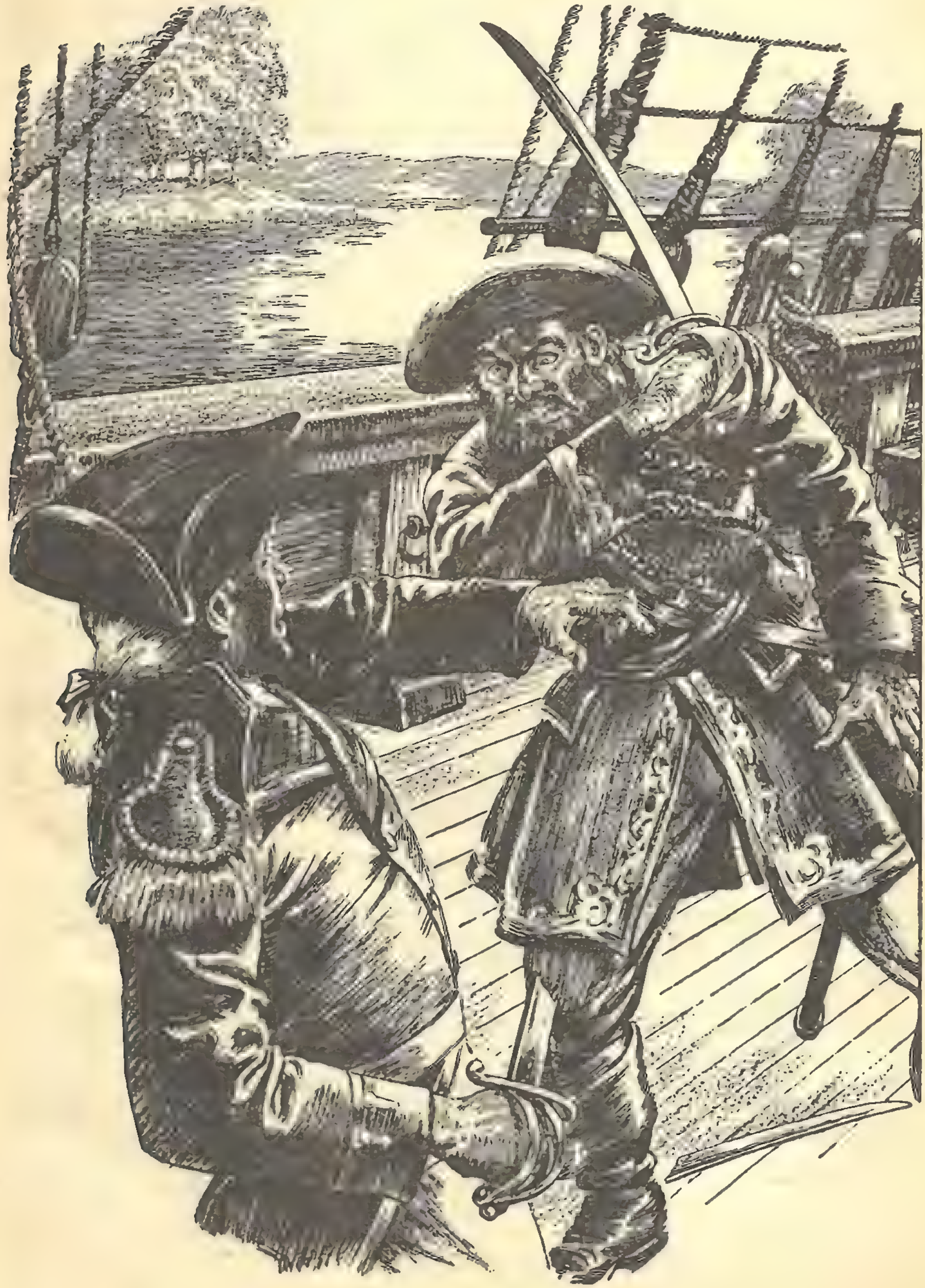
At dawn his silent steps go by,
Leaving no padded trace
On trusted stones,
Bound for the secret place
His cunning owns,
Up where the roan cliffs rim the sky.

Black were the woods at midnight, when
The buck deer leaped and died
Beneath his claws.
Now softly, limpid eyed,
On gentle paws
The cougar climbs his crags again.

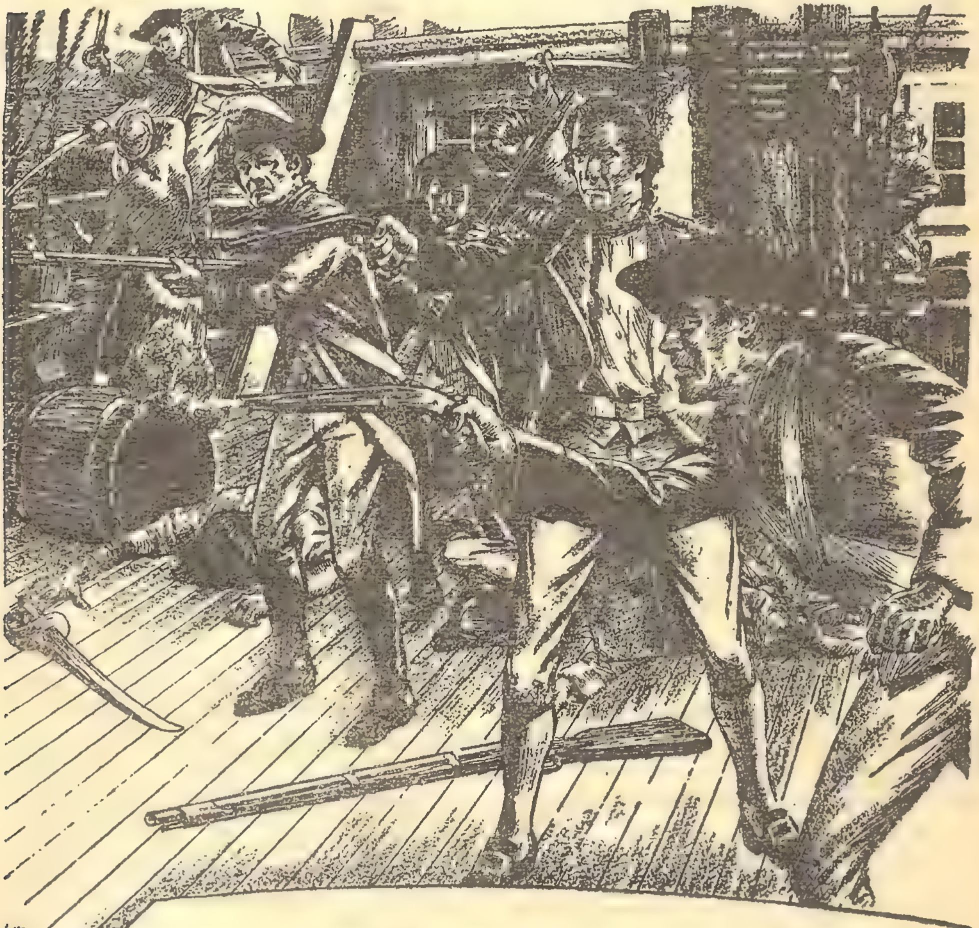
Red sun climbs with him to his haven,
Warming the lofty shelf
Where he will lie,
Grooming his faultless self,
One drowsy eye
Noting the dark passage of a raven.

DECORATION BY NICK CARDOSA

Blackbeard delivered a mighty slash with his full strength; Maynard parried successfully, but his sword was shattered like glass.



RAIDER OF THE SPANISH MAIN



By CHARLES H. KNICKERBOCKER

A BLOODTHIRSTY, swashbuckling, terrible old rascal was Captain Edward Teach, known as Blackbeard, perhaps the most cruel and colorful of the pirate kings who scourged the seas in the early part of the 18th century. Teach's career as captain lasted only two years, but in that time his evil reputation spread the length of the Atlantic coast from Labrador to Brazil. His heart was as black as his beard; his beard was as black as sin itself.

Teach was a Welshman, as many pirates were. He found his way to the West

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

Indies and there became a relatively respectable privateer during the wars with Spain in the first decade of the 1700's. After the Peace of Utrecht, he turned naturally to piracy, as did so many others. He is first heard of sailing as mate under the pirate Hornigold but soon, by his bravery and skill, he won for himself a prize vessel and set off on his own. This ship, which he named the *Queen Anne's Revenge,* was large and formidable, carrying forty cannon—she had a very small draught which enabled her to pass in shallow water when chasing small prey or when fleeing from a man-of-war. Teach often used this trick to advantage; frequently, too, he miscalculated and got stuck on a sand-bar instead.

A pirate commander had to produce prizes or his crew did not long tolerate him. Very soon after obtaining his command, Teach took a merchant ship so large its master thought it immune to pirates. A British 30-gun ship of the line—the H.M.S. *Scarborough*—was sent out to avenge this loss; pirates usually ran from warships, but Teach stood his ground and beat off the attacker in a running battle of several hours. These two victories gave the crew great confidence in their leader; under him, they began to ravage shipping up and down the coast, and Blackbeard's notoriety spread like a wheat fire.

MUCH of Teach's reputation was due to the man himself, his ferocious actions and equally ferocious appearance. He was tremendous in size, hairy, dark, ominous as a thunderhead. A vast growth of black hair covered virtually his entire face, extending as high as the cheekbones and falling to below the waist; from it peered out gleaming black eyes and an angular nose. He pleated the beard carefully into a number of pig-tails, each tied with a colored ribbon and flung over the shoulder.

A look at him was enough to terrify an honest man. Teach was a braggart, a vicious bully, a drunkard of prodigious capacity, brutal to the extreme, and possessed of a most sardonic sense of humor. He could be charming when he wished; ashore, he was a social lion. Women found him irresistible; he was married at least fourteen times.

Even the rough rascals of his crew were uneasy in the presence of their dangerous captain. Once, Teach was entertaining his pilot and his sailing master in the cabin over a quiet bowl of grog; the captain, apparently in the best of humor, was chatting about some unimportant matter when suddenly, for no good reason, he drew his pistols, blew out the candles, and fired blindly under the table. The sailing master had his knee-cap blown off and was crippled for life. When the crew protested against this behavior, Blackbeard blandly replied that if he did not kill one or two of them now and then, they might forget who he was. No one had the courage to make an issue of the matter.

The men thought of Teach as a devil in the literal sense and he was proud of it. At roll call one dusk, an extra hand was counted among the company; there was a persistent rumor from then on that Satan himself was a member of the crew. On one occasion, in a drinking bout, Blackbeard decided to test his chances in the world to come.

"Let us make a Hell of our own," he roared, "and see how long we can bear it."

So saying, he firmly closed all the hatches in the hold, lit several pots of brimstone, and went below with several members of the crew. Teach remained in the poisonous atmosphere of sulfur fumes hours longer than anyone else, a feat of which he used frequently to boast.

Some pirate captains retained command by the use of harsh discipline—but not Teach. His crew was allowed to drink and brawl and game and kill to their hearts' content. Other captains bowed to the will of the majority but not Blackbeard; the men hated him and feared him but he cowed them by sheer ferocity.

Two entries from Teach's log books are illuminating: "Rum all out," he wrote. "Our company somewhat sober — a damned confusion among us—rogues a-plotting—great talk of separation—so I looked sharp for a prize."

Then, an entry on the following day: "Took a prize with plenty of liquor on board—so kept the company hot—damned hot—then all things went well again."

Early in Teach's career, he ran across

another pirate, one Major Stede Bonnet. This strange character was an amateur pirate, a retired Army officer and respectable property owner until some quirk of lunacy ("a disorder of the mind occasioned by some discomforts he found in the married state," as a contemporary historian put it) prompted him to buy a ship and become a pirate, though he had never been to sea. Bonnet was bumbling around the waters of the Caribbean, having all kinds of trouble with a rebellious crew, when he happened upon Blackbeard. Bonnet thought it would be wise to ally himself with the master. Teach gladly took over Bonnet's sloop, put one of his own men in command of her, took Bonnet on the *Queen Anne's Revenge* where he treated him like a slave. Bonnet was able to escape on one of the occasions when Teach was stuck on a sand-bar. In revenge, Blackbeard marooned all the major's crew on a desolate key without food or water. Bonnet was able to rescue them and set off angrily in pursuit of Teach. Luckily for Bonnet, Teach had vanished. The major's subsequent career was more successful, doubtless due to lessons learned from Blackbeard, and eventually he was hanged.

In the meantime, Teach had sailed off up the coast. He lay ouside of Charleston, seizing every vessel to enter or leave the harbor. Being in need of a medicine chest, he boldly sent his lieutenant ashore with a letter to the mayor, saying he would murder all his Charleston prisoners unless the demand was granted. The pirates swaggered up the main streets, fired pistols, raided saloons, chased screaming young women like dogs in a chicken yard. They got the medicines; the rowdy landing party made such havoc that the entire town was on the verge of nervous collapse.

TEACH now had command of three vessels, and he decided to consolidate his gains. Shifting the treasure and the best men to the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, he led the flotilla over a reef. He passed safely over, but the other two ships stranded; Blackbeard sailed happily away, leaving the men to swim ashore or die of thirst as they so desired. He made for North Carolina where, with great calmness, he landed and surrendered to the governor. The latter, influenced by a share of treasure, pardoned him. Teach then lived ashore, wining and dining with the best society. He decided to marry for the fourteenth time, the governor himself officiating at a very fashionable wedding. The young Mrs. Teach had a tough time; her husband frequently used to invite some of his favorite rogues over to share her favors.

When money ran low, Teach made a brief piratical expedition to the Caribbean, returning with plenty of loot for his pal the governor. The next time he needed funds, he did not bother to go so far; he merely lay in an inlet on the Carolina coast, plundering passing traffic. The local planters had enjoyed his society at first, but this was too much. Knowing it useless to appeal to their governor, they sent an S.O.S. to the governor of Virginia; the latter, not being under the spell of Teach's personality and treasure, out-

Wolf Shows He is Smart as a Fox

SEATTLE, Wash.—Robert Wolf, service station owner here, has switched to Calvert Reserve. "It's the smart switch for any man," he says. "Calvert's lighter, smoother, a better buy."

CALVERT RESERVE BLENDED WHISKEY
86.8 PROOF—65% GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS
CALVERT DISTILLERS CORP., N. Y. C.

fitted a boat under the command of a Lieutenant Maynard and sent it to the attack. The governor of North Carolina got wind of this in time to warn Teach to pull his men out of the grog shops, but Maynard trapped the *Queen Anne's Revenge* in a tidal inlet one evening just as dusk was falling. Both ships anchored for the night. Teach, unconcerned by the danger, spent the night in a hard drinking bout. Along toward morning, someone asked him if his wife knew where he had buried treasure, in case he should be killed in the engagement. Teach replied that nobody knew but himself and the devil, and he who lived longest would take all.

Dawn broke on a glassy sea, the mirror surface unruffled by the slightest breeze. The tide was low and still going out. Teach, as usual, was anchored in shoal water, so Maynard sent out a small boat for sounding. The pirates opened fire and Maynard ran up his colors.

"Damn you for villains," bellowed Teach over the silence of the morning. "Who are you and from whence come you?"

"You may see by our colors that we are no pirates," Maynard replied.

"Send your boat aboard that we may see who you are," said Teach.

"I cannot spare my boat, but I will come aboard of you with my sloop when I can."

"Damnation seize my soul if I give you any quarter or take any from you," was Teach's reply.

"I expect no quarter and shall give none," Maynard returned.

Teach attempted to slip by under oars, but for the last time miscalculated and stuck fast. Maynard had no cannon, was out of range of Teach's guns, and could come no closer; stalemate had been reached. Hours passed; the tide turned, and the *Queen Anne's Revenge* floated again. Still there was no wind. Maynard's sloop was inching closer under oars and when they came in range, Teach let loose a broadside with devastating effect, killing twenty men. Maynard could not retaliate except with harmless small arms fire, but a breath of wind came to his rescue—it swung the *Queen Anne's Revenge* bow on, so her broadsides were useless, and it enabled Maynard to close the gap. Maynard sent his armed soldiers below, clearing his decks except for himself and the helmsman. As the ships touched, the pirates threw over a barrage of grenades, rum bottles filled with powder and shot, a weapon invented by Teach.

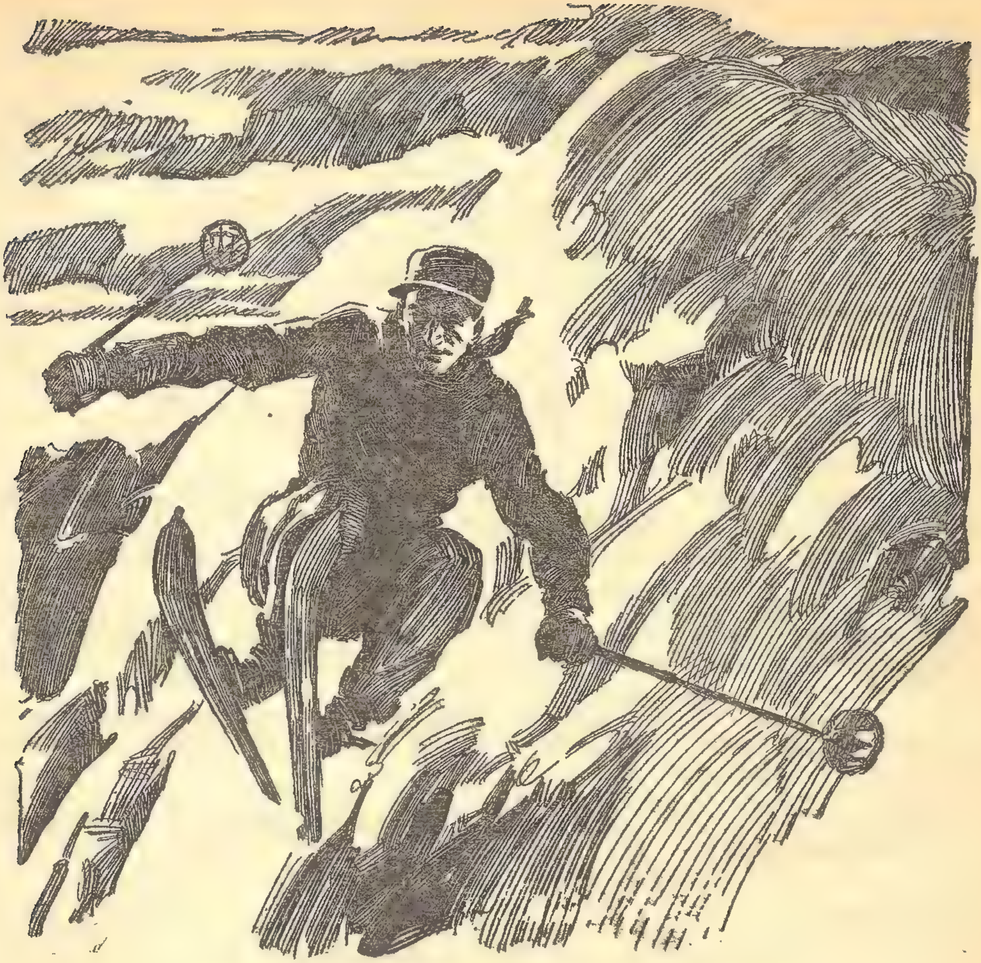
Blackbeard peered through the smoke of the explosion and, seeing the enemy deck deserted, roared, "Let us jump aboard and cut them to pieces."

THE pirates boarded, but were met by a superior force of soldiers rising from the hold. A furious hand-to-hand battle took place; blood flowed over the decks, splashed in the scuppers, even dyed the surrounding watter pink. A detachment of soldiers led by Maynard cornered the pirate leader. Maynard and Teach exchanged pistol shots, the latter being wounded, and then fell at each other with cutlasses—Blackbeard delivered a mighty slash with his full strength; Maynard parried successfully, but his sword was shattered like glass.

Teach was about to deliver the death blow when he was struck from behind. Wounded and outnumbered, Teach fought on like a baited bear, but at last fell dead with twenty-five wounds. At the death of the leader resistance collapsed; eight pirates were dead and the rest cast into irons. Aboard the *Queen Anne's Revenge* a faithful Negro cook named Caesar attempted to touch off the powder magazine and was just prevented in time.

The prisoners were taken to port and later tried and hanged. Maynard received a tremendous ovation from the citizens; the guilty governor of North Carolina was stricken with a heart attack and expired in a few days.

No one who met Teach ever forgot him. The last the planters saw of the villainous ruffian was a memorable sight, to be recalled for generations. Maynard must have been infected with some of Teach's own brand of grisly humor, for he hacked the head from the pirate's corpse and planted it on the end of his bowsprit; he came sailing into port with that famous black beard whipping in the salt breezes like a pennant, a grim warning to those who would imitate the Devil.



Helplessly, he tensed his muscles for the deadly crash.

FINAL HOURS

By JULES ARCHER

DAVID smiled wryly, reflecting that he might be the first man in history to enjoy his own suicide. But why not? There surely couldn't be a pleasanter way to die. Nor a pleasanter morning for it.

Leaning back on aluminum ski poles, he squinted up thoughtfully through pine boughs pinioned in glinting snow. The twin peaks of Old Whitey were splendidly asleep in cold, early spring sunlight. Between them, the thin handle of Devil's Fork sent three crooked white prongs spilling down the mountain face.

David decided to climb the central trail. Steeper—but quicker.

Beyond Devil's Fork, masked by the massive peaks, lay Inferno Headwall. The

ILLUSTRATED BY EVERETT RAYMOND KINSTLER

grim palisade which had challenged and destroyed champions like Hannes Steuri and Eric Klausen. Few experts were intrepid enough to do more than stare down the forbidden humpback of Old Whitey.

Curiously, he felt no trembling of the heart. As he climbed to meet the greatest reality of all, he was even singularly cheerful. The panic of fear was a potion reserved for those afraid to die, not those who sought death, voluntarily.

David idly speculated why nobody had thought of this pleasant method of exit before. Why did self-condemned men torture their last moments on earth with dread of gas, poison, a bullet? A man about to die surely ought to try to make his final hours the happiest he had ever known. For David, skiing off the humpback of Inferno Headwall would be less a jump to death than the last, supremely exhilarating experience of life.

Grimly pleased with his logic, he continued his ascent of the silent, winding trail. A young sapling, victim of a recent storm, lay in his path. Lifting his skis high, he sidestepped over it. Automatically, he turned and bent to pull it off the trail. Then he paused, broad shoulders straightening. Furrows of doubt corrugated his windburned brow.

"Why the hell should I?" he muttered aloud. What did it matter to him now, if any fool skier came hurtling down the trail and broke a leg over the tree? Dead men didn't particularly care about anything or anybody. Dead men no longer had obligations.

He resumed his alpine journey. A fresh wind sprang up behind him, breathing softly at his neck. He paused and listened, scraping snow from his boots with the tip of one of his poles. The wind was gentle and persistent. Its voice in the pines spoke of bottles of beer left behind in mountain ski huts for unknown skiers, by skiers who had been there and gone ahead. Of rocky stretches of trail marked with warnings by skiers who discovered them, for those who might follow . . .

David scowled. Turning, he slipped back a few yards to where the tree still lay across the path like a wounded doe. He dug his steel edges into frozen snow to brace himself. Then he tugged the sapling to one side of the trail.

"Probably break your fool neck anyhow!" he grumbled aloud.

He felt vaguely annoyed with himself for this typical lack of confidence in his own decisions. Climbing again, he stamped his skis with unnecessary vigor. At a steep pitch in the trail, he irritably sidestepped its height in swift, choppy movements.

Three hundred yards farther, he halted for an instant and removed one glove. He was beginning to sweat. Scooping a handful of snow off a low pine branch, he let it melt in his mouth. Doris had been astonished when she'd seen him do that, the first time he'd taken her skiing.

"Best drink in the world," he'd explained. "God put it there for skiers. Wonderful lunch with a chocolate bar. Try it." And they'd drunk a toast: "Here's snow in your eye!"

That had been before the war. Those six shining years before he'd lost the wife he loved, and gained a son he hated because of what his birth had meant. Jeff was two years old when David had come home. When the child had first crawled on his knee, David had suddenly shouted, "Get him out of here! *Get him the hell out of here!*" His mother-in-law, her face contorted in terrible pity, had rushed the bewildered child out of his sight.

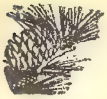
Doris had always been beside him. He'd grown terribly used to their partnership. Worse, dependent upon her courage. When he'd broken his leg on a week-end jump, and lay in bed worrying himself sick about their bills, Doris had been able to make him grin at the absurd side of it. The day he'd lost his job, back in '37, she had jammed his hat on his head, and made him take her out to a night club to celebrate.

When Doris had died, so had his confidence in himself, his interest in anything. He'd tried to buckle down to convincing people they needed insurance. He'd tried to crowd out his memories by entering ski jump meets. He'd won trophies, and once his picture appeared in a ski magazine. But he couldn't kid himself.

Doris' death had amputated his courage for living. What was he expected to do—grin like an idiot, clasp a strange kid to his bosom, and carry on for dear old Yale?

David struck savagely at a probing

branch that snatched at his ski jacket. Flurries of disturbed snow whirled into the wind.



DEVIL'S FORK, with its three snowy prongs, loomed up before him two hours later. Resting his poles against a tree, David released his bindings and kicked off his skis. He sat down on an uprooted fir at one side of the trail. It was beginning to snow lightly, but he untied his scarf and opened his collar.

Puffs of vapor issued from his mouth as he sighed, massaging the tired muscles of his thighs and calves. He had never been able to reach the shadows of Old Whitey's twin peaks without feeling utterly exhausted. He lit a cigarette, gazing at the three trails running down to civilization. Any one of them would take him home. Back to selling policies to "far-sighted people who remember the future," as the company's ads said.

The cooling of his body temperature roused him. He got up and snapped his boots into the ski bindings. Then he took a final, fascinated look down the mountain. Last chance, boy, he reminded himself grimly. All ashore that's going ashore. Not interested? O.K. . . . it's *your* funeral.

His bitter laugh echoed weakly through the woods.

It was even harder work climbing between the twin peaks of Old Whitey than it had been to reach Devil's Fork. There was some consolation in being above timberline, where the snow was fresh and powdery, in contrast to the wet snow on the trails. Perspiring freely, David edged his skis hard into the ledge he was following. He braced heavily on his right pole to keep from side-slipping.

The narrow pass, used by mountain climbers in summer to circle the peaks, called for careful footing. David's lips curled in wry amusement as he realized that he was trying to keep from being killed . . . prematurely.

At last, breathless and triumphant, he was through the peaks. Beneath his skis lay the shoulders of Old Whitey. They stretched smoothly down in a deceptively easy grade. He could barely see the beginning of the hump that marked the cliff of Inferno Headwall. In the far distance, the silent countryside stretched tidily below, like a realtor's table miniature.

It seemed to be waiting.

The sun was higher now in a deeper blue sky. It had stopped snowing. Cotton taffy clouds floated lazily on the horizon. It was a beautiful day. Skier's weather.

David's tongue felt dry in his throat. He let his eyes rest on the last edge of mountain he could see before it dipped out of sight. He knew what lay beneath it. Hannes Steuri and Eric Klausen had known, too. Yet unlike him, those famous schuss-boomers hadn't wished to stop living.

The Old Whitey Ski Club had expressly forbidden any skier to risk his neck on the Inferno Headwall. But Steuri had thought he could make the giant jump. One weekday, when the trails were deserted as usual, Steuri had taken the Headwall alone.

They had found his body at the foot of Old Whitey next day.

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Klausen hadn't even intended to jump. He had just wanted the thrill of schussing down the Headwall, intending to christie to a stop at its brink. But he'd gone over. Skiers who had seen him try it said he had screamed as he disappeared over the ledge.

David removed his skis. He pulled a scraper out of his hip pocket. Kneeling, he worked the climbing wax off each ski. Then he applied blue wax in the cambers, to repel clinging wet snow on the lower levels. He rubbed red speed wax over all, finger-testing the smoothness of each runner. Then he added paraffin, and grunted with satisfaction.

Suicide by fast express guaranteed.

He stamped into his bindings and locked them. He pulled on his gloves, adjusted his visor. Squinting in the bright sun, he took a last admiring look up at the imperturbable peaks of Old Whitey. Then he thrust his poles hard into the snow, and shoved off.

Skis tight together, leaning forward with vorlage, he felt the thrill of the downhill run begin to tingle in his blood. There was only one sound in that lonely white wilderness in the clouds. It came from the soft sibilance of his skis along the rolling grade that led down to the hump. A long, rising hiss. Like the distant whistle of bombs, growing louder as they curved down.

Louder and louder and louder. . . .

He unweighted and swerved sharply. The boulder that had thrust its black shoulders through the mantle of gleaming snow fell away to one side. Incongruously, David felt tempted by the challenge of the sport. Habit is strong in a skier. He pretended he was running a slalom course. Executing a skillful series of tempo turns, he wove in and out of an imaginary grouping of slalom poles.

His grin of exhilaration faded. He was dissipating his speed, he realized. You had to be hitting it up when you soared off a jump. Or you just fell off. Sobered, he straightened his course. Down he went in an unerring schuss, gathering momentum. His skis, rigidly together, seemed like a single long arrow flying through the snow. The noise of the wind grew louder in his ears.

Worry began to gnaw the edges of his mind. Suppose . . . suppose he flinched at the last moment? Spilled or checked his speed, and plunged off the brink in an agonized heap? He moistened his lips anxiously. If there was one thing he couldn't bank on any more, it was his confidence. The habit of self-preservation, strongly developed in skiers who flirt with death, would fight against his determination to make the leap into space.

For a brief instant, Jeff flashed across his mind. His son, who would be an orphan in less than five minutes. Now, *there's* a bright thought, he flayed himself bitterly. Slashing his poles angrily into the snow, he whipped up a faster pace.

The wind was beginning to bluster. He felt it flap at his flaming cheeks. White powder churned in bigger sprays before his speeding skis. Banking a turn, he sped into the eclipse of light under one of Whitey's peaks. The world grew suddenly bleak and chill. Glare from the sunlit slopes behind made the long shadow on Inferno Headwall glow a rich purple.

Now he was on the summit of the Headwall.

His ski tips pointed down almost vertically.

This is it, David breathed. God help me, this is it. His body felt suddenly flaccid and trembling. His gloved hands closed tightly around the leather grips of his poles. His breath came slow and icily, in contrast to the rhythm of his heart.

Flashing powder spumed in his wind-whipped wake as he spun his weight down the giant palisade.

THE wind howled an outraged expostulation.

Blast-impelled tears welled up fiercely beneath his visor. He was momentarily blinded. He blinked hard. On the far fringes of the Headwall, to either side, forests blurred into bluish smears.

David felt his legs grow icy. The slack in his ski pants fluttered behind him like snapping pennants. In the torrential rush of his flight, he could barely feel the mountain beneath him.

He raced furiously over a hummock that jarred him.

His mouth suddenly fell open in dismay. A huge black crag, like a mountain monster intent on killing and devouring its prey, loomed directly in his path. David's heart skipped crazily as the rock rushed headlong to meet him.

No time to turn. Impossible to christie at the rocket-line speed he was schussing. Death, death, death . . .

Hypnotically, he watched the monster swell swiftly in size. It blotted out the world. He was going to crash.

Panic gave him strength. Crouching low, David swiftly pegged his poles firmly ahead of him. He vaulted high into the air between them. As high as his body could spring.

There was a breathless, unreal moment of apprehension. Life paused in a frieze of time. Then he groaned.

Not high enough!

He winced and caught his breath. A sickening, rasping noise splintered the silence. His face went tight in a vise of terror. Helplessly, he tensed his muscles for the deadly crash.

Then his eyes shot open in wonder. His skis were skimming a narrow inch above the crag. Only his poles were scraping. He was clearing it—actually clearing it. A wild cry of exultation welled in his throat.

His desperate *galundesprung* sailed him clear of the grim barrier. He cushioned the shock of landing by crouching deeply. His skis, one ahead of the other, returned to the snow with a heavy thud.

No time to enjoy his triumph. Down, down, down he flew, checked only by the friction of the wind. Never before in his life had he raced so fast. He gasped with the exertion of breathing. His lips were frozen, twisted in a grimace of wild joy. The screaming uproar of his self-made gale deafened him.

Then suddenly he was aware of it. The end of the hump. The one-way ticket. Another second, and he would be springing off the end of Inferno Headwall. The end of the world.

His mouth twitched uncontrollably. Oh, God, let me keep my nerve now. Let me not flinch.

The wind howled at him now. It tore at his flesh with iron claws. He laughed out loud. Hysterically, happily. His whole body was alive with the intoxication of the adventure.

All right, Old Whitey, all right—you can collect me now! I'm paying off . . .

David threw aside his poles, as though shedding life.

He gasped and shrieked aloud as he flew off the edge of the bluff that reared majestically against the sky.

HE WAS high in the heavens. God almighty, he was high! Alone, soaring through space. There was a sudden sweet singing in the air. It was fine, it was pure up here. The golden entrance into the unknown, through which most men travel when they are already dead. David laughed without sound.

His skis were sailing along a rising arc, as though grooved to the path of an invisible rainbow. David inhaled deeply. A peaceful lethargy relaxed his taut muscles. He hadn't flinched. It was a beautiful jump. He surrendered himself limply into the wind. He felt himself turning slowly in space.

The horizon dropped away as he spun slowly backwards in flight. His head dropped lower than his skis. The world pirouetted dizzily. David felt sick, deeply sick in his stomach. The light was blacking out. He heard the sweet, plunging roar of a cataract . . .

In a timeless void, he seemed to hear a noise of thunderous rhythm. Clouds rolled back, like stage curtains, to reveal applauding hands. A thousand pairs, clapping in unison. Now he saw a sea of upturned faces. They had only mouths, which were open in cheers and shouts. They were acclaiming someone, David thought in surprise.

Surely . . . surely not *him?*

A wild notion trembled at his heart. Yes . . . yes, it *was* for him! They imagined he was actually trying to *make* the jump that had killed Klausen and Steuri! They didn't realize . . .

The delicious irony of it made him shake with laughter. If by some miracle he did make the jump and live, he reflected mirthfully, they would think he was a hero. A champion of champions. He'd be acclaimed the world's greatest jumper.

Jeff would be the proudest kid in town.

How long had his eyes been closed? One second? Two? Time, as it had been in Guinea so long ago, was meaningless now. A year's bundle of illusions, impressions, thoughts could be telescoped into one dynamic second. This was what they said it was like just before a man drowned.

He was conscious for an instant of seeing the twin peaks of Old Whitey, obliquely upside down. Like the roots of a giant extracted tooth. His flight through space seemed timeless, endless.

He opened his mind to the fantastic idea that fought for his attention. Suppose . . . just suppose he didn't join Klausen and Steuri in eternal anonymity? Suppose he lived to tell the story? To be the only man in the world who had ever jumped off the Headwall and conquered it by staying alive!

The challenge thrilled his imagination. In a flash of intuition, he understood the great stakes to be gained. Stakes greater than the adulation of the ski world, or of his own son. *Never again would he lack self-respect or confidence!* If he could succeed in this amazing attempt, how could he fail to succeed in the much simpler demands which were made of him in everyday life?

And . . . *what had he to lose by trying?* His life?

In a blinding flash of decision, David suddenly determined that he would not die.

He swallowed thick beads of sweat on his lips. Grimly, he shut the spinning world out of mind. He whipped his arms furiously like wings. The frenzied effort made his whole body surge forward in shuddering spasms.

He pressed fiercely up into the wind.

Abruptly, inexorably, the horizon rose into view between the tips of his skis. David gasped gratefully.

He was upright. He had a chance—a chance to try . . .

He scanned the snow-clad bottom of Old Whitey with feverish, inflamed eyes. The saliva was frozen on his chin. Now the ground was rushing up to meet him, like a huge anvil.

The high curve of his flight had passed its peak.

He was roaring downward now, faster downward.

An iron fist of consternation squeezed his heart. Directly beneath and ahead lay a closely-grouped clump of snow-covered pines. At the tremendous speed he was travelling, he would hit them like an explosion of blood and flesh.

He summoned the last ounce of exhausted energy in his shaking body. Blood pounded in his ears. He threshed the air desperately, propelling himself outward in writhing surges. Height . . . height . . . height! Every inch was precious.

Down he soared toward the waiting trees.

They huddled together, as though for protection against the giant bird that had flown from the Headwall.

In another second there was a wild rustle of pine and an explosion of snow as a small stalk of needles ripped off a topmost limb of the first tree.

David flailed his aching arms for a last terrible effort.

Every muscle strained for precious inches. His eyes bulged with shock and despair as he heard the furious, sharp scrape of branches. Snow churned along the bottom of his skis.

And then suddenly he was clear. Over the trees.

Clear!

He cried out gratefully. The ground roared up beneath him, like the dizzy racing of a runway seen through the open belly of a bomber coming in to land.

David flexed his knees quickly. He thrust one shoulder forward, left ski advanced. Then he braced himself for the terrible shock or spill.

This was the decision—life or death . . .

He hit the ground like a thunderbolt.

A gigantic bump jolted him with shattering violence. His chin collided with his knee. Twice his thighs slammed against his heels. Every organ in his body felt jarred out of place.

But he hadn't spilled!

Half-stunned by the concussion, he struggled furiously to maintain his balance. His skis flashed along the rolling plateau with mercurial speed. He tried to check. It was impossible. As though swept along in a giant waterfall, he was imprisoned by his own lightning momentum.

One hundred miles an hour, he guessed in dazed trepidation.

Without warning, he suddenly ploughed

(Continued on page 125)

THE SAGA OF PARSON JACK

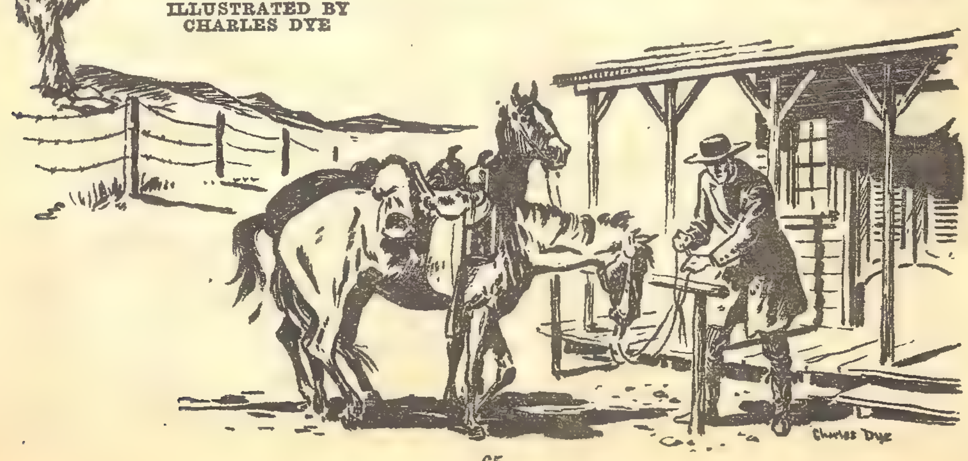
By Sam Stewart

Now Parson Jack rode the circuit track
  In the cow land 'way out west,
And he'd stop to preach, and he'd try to teach
  Folks that Christian ways were best.
But his task was hard, for I'll tell you, pard,
  That he met some ornery folks.
They would laugh and hoot (and sometimes they'd
    shoot)
  And sneer at his "Bible jokes."

But Jack kept on; and one day at dawn
  He rode into Juniper Flat.
(No tougher place scars up the face
  Of the earth—be sure of that.)
He tied his mare by the Grizzly Bear
  (That's the name of the town's saloon)
And he went inside, where he bravely tried
  To warble a gospel tune.

GRIZZLY
BEAR
BAR

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES DYE



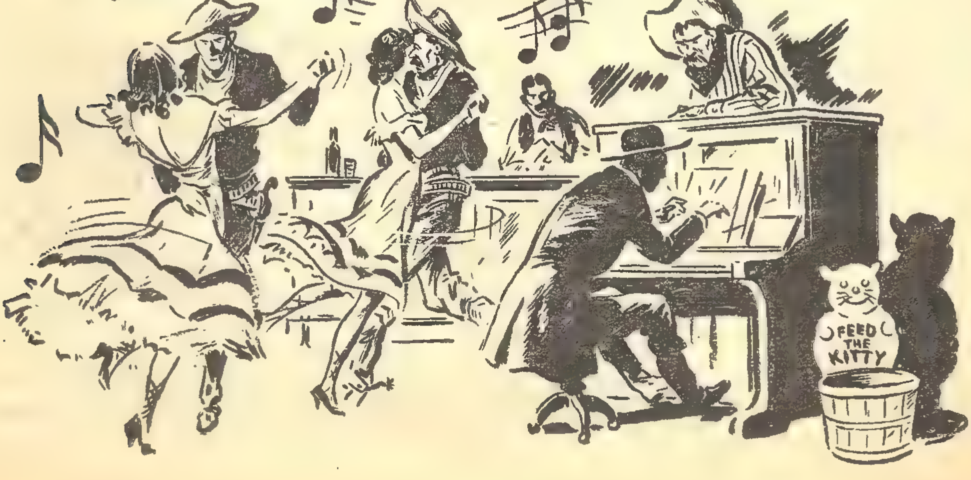
STRICKLY CASH
HYMNS

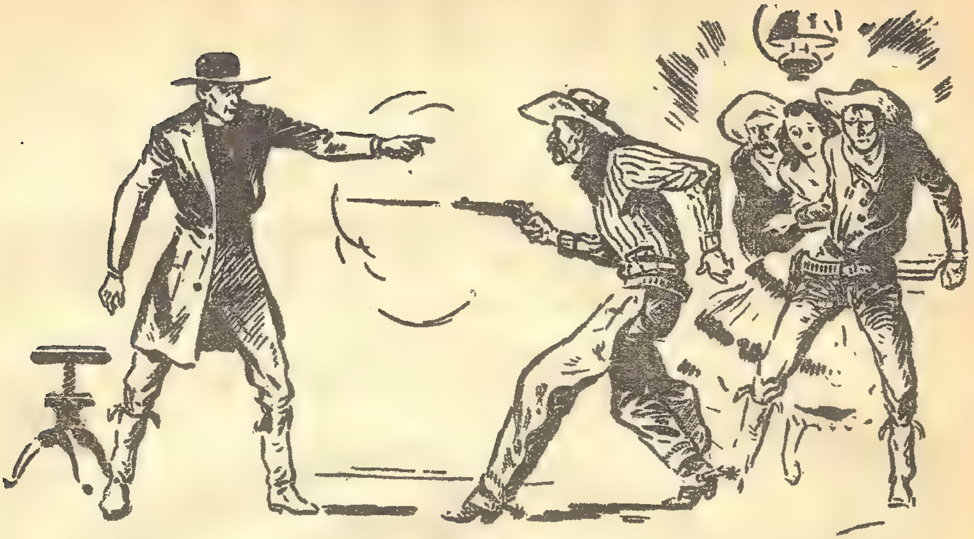
For a verse or two they heard him through
  Then Black Bill pulled his gun;
This tough outlaw, with a loud guffaw,
  Thought he saw a chance for fun.
"Say, Parson Jack," was his opening crack,
  "We don't like your churchy chants.
You grab a chair by the keyboard, there,
  And play for us while we dance."

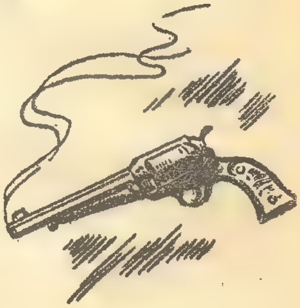
Well, the men folks roared but Jack looked bored,
  And he sat down on the stool.
With an expert's ease he massaged the keys—
  He could play like a doggoned fool!
Hymns? I'd say not. First a fast fox trot,
  Then he'd change time to a waltz.
Then first we'd know, how his hands would go—
  And there wasn't a note hit false.

Cowhands and girls, in dervish whirls
  Went reeling 'round the room.
Then Parson Jack pushed the old stool back
  And he made the bass chords boom.
It wasn't a tune, and pretty soon
  They howled for a snappy rag.
But Jack looked queer, like he didn't hear—
  Like a guy who's been on a jag.

He hammered the bass and his sober face
  Didn't go with the noise he made.
Black Bill got sore and he gave a roar
  As he pushed to where old Jack played.
"Hey, what the hell!" we heard him yell
  As he grabbed Jack by the hand.
"That's thunder, sir," we heard Jack purr,
  "Like it roared when you shot Tom Rand."





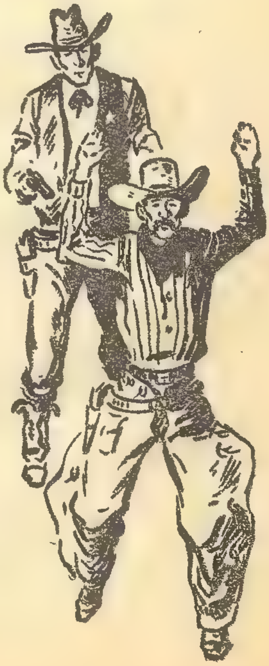


"Why, you dirty whelp!" Bill gave a yelp
And he reached for his forty-four.
But Parson Jack wouldn't leave his track
And he said: "I'll tell you more.
"You sneaked on Tom while he read his Psalm
Like I'd taught him to do each day.
Then you killed him cold and you stole his gold,
For I saw you run away.

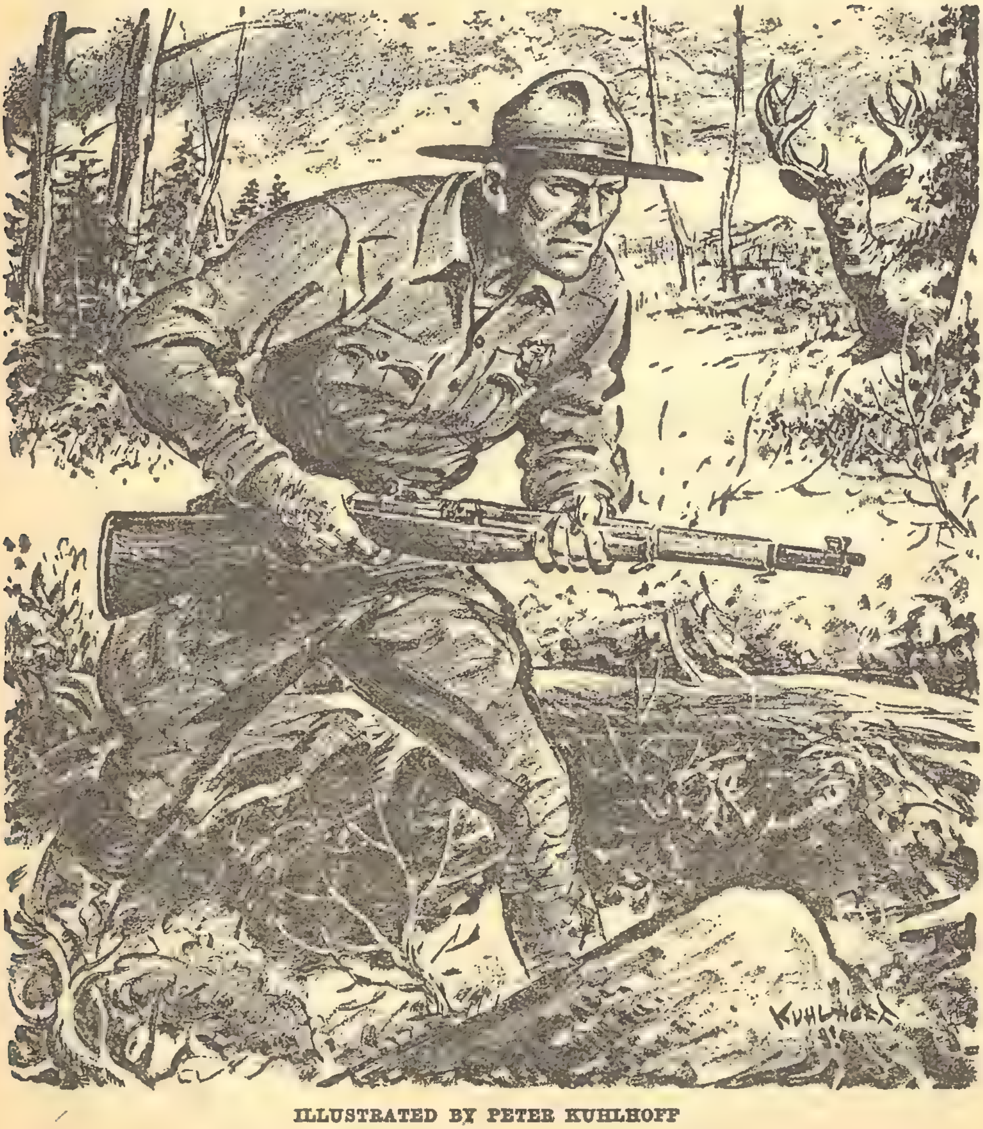
"I was there outside—didn't need to hide—
For the rain was a perfect screen.
In the lightning's glare I saw you there—
And I knew that the Lord had seen."
Bill pulled his gat and he fired straight at
The figure of Parson Jack.
The bullet struck; but Jack didn't duck
And Black Bill staggered back.

"Your bullet's force is no good, of course,
When it's matched with the word of God."
Said Jack, and there bowed his head in prayer
As Black Bill dropped his rod.
Bill got as pale as an antelope's tail
And he sank to his shaking knees.
"God! As you said, I shot him dead.
Like I shot you," we heard him wheeze.

"Have not a doubt that your sins will out,"
Said Jack, when the sheriff came.
"God knows all things, and sin only brings
Retribution for your shame."
Then Parson Jack drew his jacket back
And he pulled his Bible free.
A chunk of lead ripped the leaves a-shred,
And Jack prayed: "Lord, thanks to thee."



ONE BUCK —AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



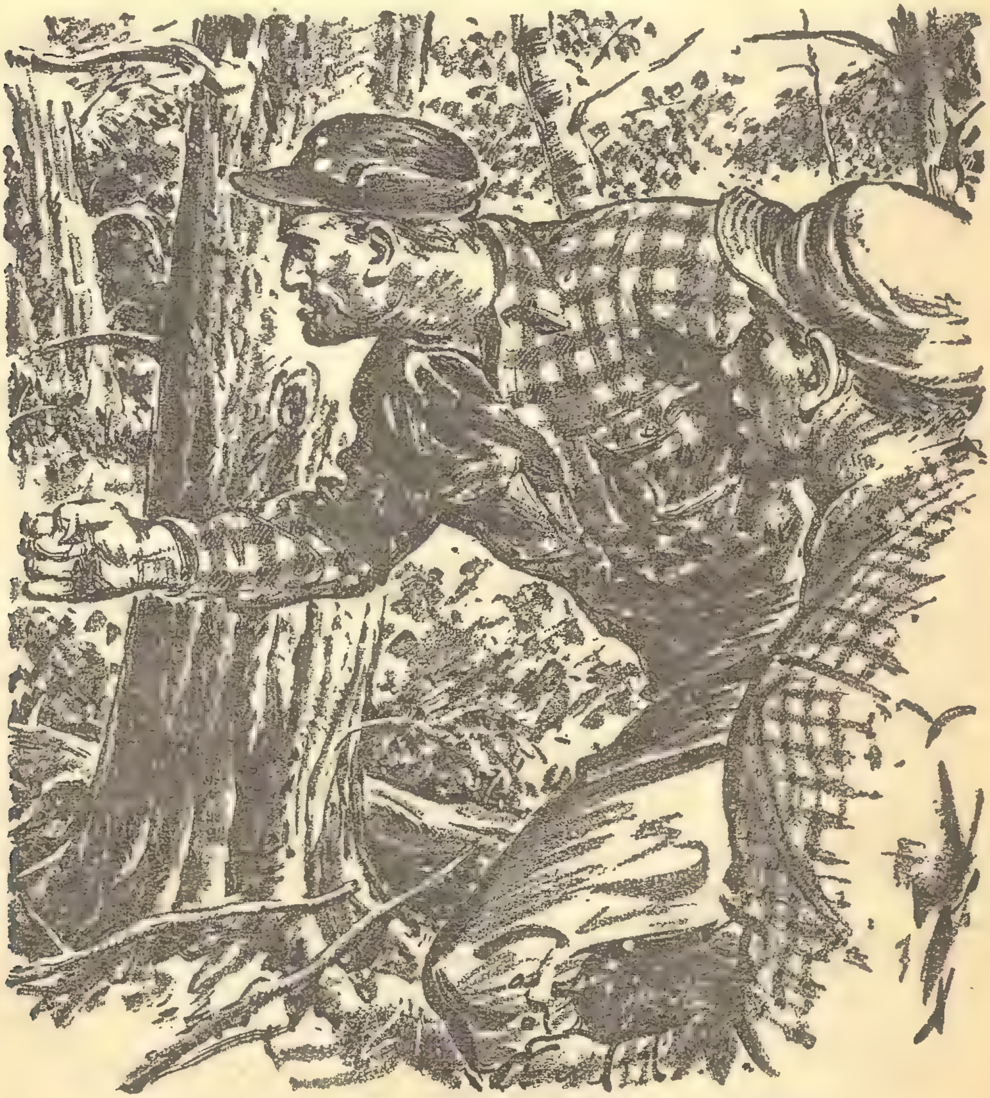
ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

By ARTHUR H. CARHART

A TWO-LEGGED toadstool in faded plaid shirt, hard-worn jeans, and tan pee-wee boots that had lost their glory, ambled down the cinder-filled railway station platform at Mochila, found a slash of shade in the baggage room doorway and leaned against the sun-peeled, dirty saffron boards as though a permanent stopping point had been reached.

Any resident within leagues would know that ambulatory toadstool effect was produced by the big, high-peaked sand-colored hat Dan Poe wore as one concession to his vocation of dude rancher. The faded and brush-scuffed stem of this assembly was Dan; a little grayed in his rusty hair, more than a little wrinkled in cheeks around his thinnish mouth. His winter gray eyes were restless under brows that were kinky and weather bleached.

Those who knew Dan well, would have



"Give me that rifle, you lousy, welching punk!" snapped Truitt. "And arrest me if you think you can make it stick!"

seen that he was troubled. For the life of him, Dan Poe couldn't have put his finger on what spawned that nagging suspicion of trouble between men, but it kept gnawing at his peace of mind. It was something about the letter he had stuffed back of the hand-tooled belt which was a somewhat unnecessary bit of extravagant haberdashery, since his old jeans hugged his thin hips so tightly he'd have to shift to a more ample pair come time to don cold weather underwear.

Dan pulled the long envelope from his belt, stared at it, read his name in the address, looked again at the return card which read *The T-T-T- Lines; Truitt Truck Transport,* and stuffed the envelope containing the message back behind the heavy, scroll-worked belt. He knew what was in the letter signed by a bold, stub-pen scrawl that spelled out *T. Cressman Truitt.*

Big looking stationery, big sounding name, big important sort of a signature —and probably this guy who was coming to stay through the whole season at Dan Poe's Paison Ranch headquarters would be a wormy little nut, with stomach ulcers, too much money, a bad temper and darned little savvy in hunting western mule deer. Probably one of those city-soft dudes on a special diet and demanding special attention. Maybe one of those trigger-nervous specimens that carried a dangerous rifle. Well, couldn't stop his coming; train he said he'd arrive on was due any minute—and Dan's peculiar uneasiness was increasing.

He looked speculatively at surroundings of Mochila. Sage brush patches between stands of pinon pine and scrub cedar tried to soften the harsh, cliffy breaks that piled northward toward naked tips of the Ragged Mountains. In the other direction, the scrambled ridges, mesas and sharp, many-armed little canyons, clothed in scrub oak, more sage, a lot of cactus and soap weed, stretched to a lost distance beyond the Four Corners, where Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah have the common point of meeting.

It was pretty tough country; and the people who lived there fitted the environment.

IT WAS hot for early October; no deer hunting weather at all. Whole country dry. Tinder. Aspen leaves had turned yellow in higher elevations, patches of service berry were dabs of gold near green conifer forests, the oak leaves were wine red, bronze brown, leathery green but no snow had come for tracking game. A dry twig snapping could be heard half a mile by the big scoop-eared mule deer. Going to be tough hunting and some of the customers at the Paison Ranch probably wouldn't fill their licenses. Bad enough situation before T. Cressman Truitt announced he was coming to the Paison.

It wasn't just worriment about getting the dudes to where they could knock over a deer that seeped through Dan Poe; it was something beyond that, a nebulous warning of more than average difficulties, and it had begun when he'd opened the letter from Truitt. Chal Parker, attorney, sportsman, friend, who held a reservation for big game season had decided not to come. Truitt was coming instead; he'd made arrangements with Parker to fill the vacancy. Maybe that was it. Truitt hadn't given Dan a chance to be told he needn't come. Just bulling along without any opportunity for sizing him up to see if he would fit in with the bunch of repeat customers who gathered season after season at the Paison, to bring in big, rim-rocker bucks.

Dan shrugged. Probably should be thankful to have a paying customer fill in when Parker decided not to come. He looked up as boot soles crunched on the cinder platform. It was the dark, forest-green uniform with a badge pinned over the left breast pocket of the green shirt, that threw Dan for a moment. He wasn't forewarned that Carl Simmons was in any sort of uniform; not since getting back from Far East service.

"Hoping I'd see you around," said Simmons, thrusting out a brown hand that gripped with solid friendship.

"Been a long time," said Dan Poe, casually.

Simmons nodded. "Some years. Lot happened."

Dan appraised Carl Simmons from field boots, to dark, lean face. Maybe the thin features were a little sharper etched, but the deep brown eyes that could be friendly or darken into unreadable depths, were the same; so was the wide grin over white teeth. But Carl was still part Indian, quarter-blood Shoshone, with the strange touch of reserve of that race. Carl always had been a lot of man packed into five feet eleven inches and about a hundred seventy weight.

Dan glanced at the badge, and said, "Miracles do happen. Your being game warden proves it."

Carl grinned. "It's outdoor work, I get paid, and even if I have taken game out of season sometimes, it was when I needed the meat and where game was plentiful. It's work I know—from every side, including law violation."

"Lot in what you say. If you're going to be stationed here—"

"Just for big game season and the ten day post-season over in Ute Basin beyond The Mirror," said Carl. "Tim Lacey, district chief, coming in on the train. Going to set up game checking station to the north. Your camp full, Dan?"

"Some sport coming in on the narrow-gauge, that'll fill all bunks," replied Dan. "Big trucking company president from middle west named Truitt—T. Cressman Truitt, for short."

Dan Poe couldn't have defined what got frosty about Carl Simmons. No tightening of muscle-bunches at the base of the jaw, no gripping of hands, or anything like that. But the Indian look, blank and masking, came into Carl's eyes.

"Know this Truitt?" Dan was casual.

"There's only one T. Cressman Truitt I ever heard of." Carl was more than casual.

"Don't go Indian on me, Carl," said Dan. "If you've got any sign on this jasper, let me have it. I've got to manage him for couple of weeks. What's he like?"

"Big. Maybe two hundred pounds. All bone and muscle. Red-faced, big shoulders, got a busted nose, and hard-boiled."

"Keep talking," ordered Dan, softly. "You've given me dimensions; now what's inside the man?"

"Heap of guts of a certain type," said Carl. "Goes after anything he wants or anything in his way, like one of his big trucks."

"You've tangled with him; Army, maybe." Dan kept probing.

Carl Simmons looked steadily at Dan, and said, "Long story. One of my best buddies got shot in the back; kid named Larry Johnson. He disobeyed orders that meant sure death for him. Whole outfit was in a jam; Truitt was captain of the truck outfit. I was a sergeant. Quite a stink over what happened. Both of us got busted. Johnson is still alive, and in the hospital, after all this time, because I picked him up in the truck I was driving, and got him to first aid—and got busted for it." No bitterness about it as Carl told it; just a cold presentation of the barest facts—with Dan having to guess the details of men driven by impulse while under fire. Did Carl mean that Truitt had shot Johnson, deliberately, after he had disobeyed orders?

THE little engine that dragged three, battered narrow-gauge coaches up to Mochila four times a week, and then backed down into the canyon to the main line of the narrow-gauge again, came whooping around the cliffs. The whistle was a fog-horn bellow. Nobody knew why Mochila was still visited by one of the remaining operative narrow-gauge trains, unless engine, cars and crew had gotten the habit when the tungsten mine was operating and couldn't get over the habit. Of course, there was the mail contract; Mochila was the one place in miles where residents could step into a slab-sided building, ask for mail, or write out a money order for saddles, shovels, slips or shoes, and have them delivered at the parcel post window.

The little train panted to a stop, pudgy Tim Lacey kicked a dunnage bag off the open platform of the smoker, and sort of rolled after his plunder. He had both big paws out to shake hands with Dan and Carl. Lacey was heavy, bluff, red-faced, oldish, uniformed as Carl was, but bulged under the green cloth.

"Someone looking for you," Carl said to Dan, as greetings concluded. "Better start riding herd on him before he takes off in some direction on his own."

"Drop by the ranch, both of you," said Dan as he turned to head toward the guest who had shoved into the place Parker had vacated.

Carl had described Truitt well. He had a sort of bull-dozer bulkiness that conveyed an immediate impression of physical power; not fleshy fat, but sinew, bone and thick muscles. Truitt was in a spanking-new, full-dress outfit that expressed what a department store clerk considered proper for the gentleman deer hunter; red cap, red and black north-woods shirt and fawn-colored cord riding breeches tucked into high-top, laced engineer boots. It was dead center for what the classy magazines print as hunter dress, but Dan winced a little at the heavy lumberjack shirt, the breeches and those high boots that bind the calf of the leg. Truitt couldn't be told how off center some of his outfit might be; he'd have to find out. Not the kind that could be told anything, Dan decided.

"Well, well," boomed Truitt, thrusting out a big, hairy, freckled hand toward Dan Poe. "If your name's Poe, guess you're lookin' for me. Certainly appreciate your meeting—"

Truitt's handshake and words chopped off, cold. He stared down the platform. He stood as though braced against shock.

"What's that guy Simmons doing around here?" Truitt's voice was husky.

"Simmons? Oh, he's here on special game warden work. Other fellow's Tim Lacey, district chief warden."

"I don't care a whoop about Lacey," said Truitt. "It's the other guy. So he's game-wardening around here! What a set-up!"

Truitt took a long stride toward Simmons and Lacey, as they turned to walk along the platform in the other direction. Dan Poe eased to where Truitt would have to shove him out of the way if he kept on after Simmons.

"They'll be by the ranch, if you have business with either of them," said Dan, shortly. "Let's get your plunder in the station wagon, and get going. We'll be late for dinner as it is."

"So he'll be by your ranch," said Truitt. "Well, I can wait. I have been waiting to meet him again."

Dan let it pass. He knew now where the trouble lay; trouble between two men.

Truitt was still silent, looking at the country with cold, blue eyes that apparently were not seeing anything, as the station wagon left U.S. 168 and began the twisty, dusty trip up the dirt side road toward the head of the box canyon where the Paison Ranch snuggled under some old yellow pines.

Anyone not sunk in blind thought would have been seeing the parade of scenery along the side road. The valley was a ragged corridor back into the solid, stone block of Mirror Mesa. The cliffs surrounding the bottom lands where the road swung past little meadows and ruby colored clumps of chokecherry bushes, were banded with colors. Cedar, piñon and occasional stands of yellow pine were in the side draws and under the rim. There were cliff dwellings back of many of those timber clumps below the sheer, thousand foot upsweep of rock.

Dan Poe had come in here with an archeological group twenty years earlier, working as packer and camp tender. He'd stayed in the stone-girt canyon; homesteaded the ranch; called it the Paison, the Spanish name for the strange bird known as the road-runner—the homely, swift-traveling brown bird that kills rattlesnakes. This bird was Dan's insigne; on his tackle, carved in the pine door of the main house at the ranch, stenciled on the side of the old station wagon in which he hauled his university friends who returned to dig posts each summer, and the clients he had built up and selected for hunting season business. He had selected them; just as they had looked Dan Poe and his place over thoroughly, and decided it was their sort of an outfit to serve in big game hunting. They paid; but they were also invited guests.

All except Truitt. He'd just said he was coming. Dan wondered just why he'd bulled in.

"Parker couldn't make it out here, I guess," suggested Dan.

"I bought him off," said Truitt, flatly. "Traded him a moose hunt in New Brunswick for his reservation here. Parker's legal counsel for my truck lines. If he hadn't played ball I'd got a new attorney."

"Special reason you wanted to come

here?" Dan spoke mildly. But he felt raspy toward Truitt.

"Special," agreed Truitt. "There's an extra big buck deer out here; set of antlers that's probably a record. Heard about him when my family were at the O Bar X guest ranch last summer. I've come out here to nail that trophy head."

"Just like that," said Dan, dustily. "You've come to get the big buck."

"I've come to get that buck," said Truitt. "And no smart game warden or anything else is going to get in the way."

"It's a free country," remarked Dan. "Season's open. You get a non-resident license and you take your chance, along with maybe fifty other fellows who are gunning for that buck's head."

"I'll get a license, and I'll get that head," said Truitt. "That's what I came for." After a lapse he added, "That was my original plan for coming here."

Truitt was silent a moment, looking at the dusty road winding in toward the station wagon. Then he said, almost as though to himself, "Maybe with that game warden around, there's some other business I can wrap up besides gettin' me a trophy deer head."

Dan Poe opened his mouth to say the open season didn't include game wardens. He thought better of it. Maybe Truitt had no idea of laying sights on Carl Simmons. Could be—either way.

With the country dry, no tracking snow, game still in high country, leaves still on aspen and scrub oak, and a camp full of hunters who expected to get their venison in spite of the weather, it wasn't going to be a picnic for anyone. Truitt's strong-headed decision that he was going to get the big buck was something to cap off difficulties on all other counts. He'd probably horse around, keeping the outfit set to bag that buck. Bad enough.

But with Truitt and Carl Simmons in the same hunting area, high-power rifles in everyone's hands, a rankling hatred between them, born of bullet-business in some Far East spot where men killed men as part of the day's job. . . .

Dan Poe looked at the sun-splashed beauty of the little basin walled by Mirror Mesa, the snug, log-constructed buildings of the Paison Ranch just ahead, and the outlook was disturbing—no less.

CHAPTER II

HUNTER'S CHOICE

FAR west across the mesa country the October sun had slipped down behind the blue masses of the La Sal Mountains. Down under the rim rock lights were lit at the Paison Ranch. Miles out beyond the notched portal of the valley, where lower, rolling country was misty with dusk-shaded sagebrush, lights of an approaching car were a dancing spark in the creeping darkness that oozed up to fill vast space as the red afterglow slowly died.

The big buck stood beside the trunk of an old, wind-twisted cedar, looking down into the flat-floored valley. He had selected ways of escape if danger came sneaking in. There was a game trail back through scrub oak to the left, and in two jumps he could be into that brush-curtained corridor, swinging toward the open spaces and cedar clumps on the table-topped mesa. The other way of escape was by dodging around the old cedar, plunging down a sharp slope to a little bench where pines were thick, and he then could sneak back through them toward the timber-dotted country above.

His head was up. His big scoop ears were swiveling to catch any sound that might be made by enemies. He tested the wind coming up from below, caught the taint of horses, the faint scent of man, picked up by air currents passing the ranch. There was no sign of immediate danger, but he knew hunt time was in the air.

Two impulses clashed inside the big buck. He knew the signs of danger just ahead; men in the hills, camps where men sang, or snored, or sometimes quarreled; red-garbed men riding to scout the country before opening day. The big buck had been shot at once this day; by a trigger-eager fellow who would take venison the day before the season opened and try to get away with it. That generally happened; some human who would break rules and shoot before season, gave warning that in another dawn or two, every man moving would be carrying potential death for any deer sighted.

Caution was the command to the big buck.

But the other impulse was directly against caution. His neck had swelled a little. The rut was on the verge of starting. He had felt the mating urge mounting since he had rubbed the last velvet from his great spread of antlers several weeks before. Those horns were strong, polished and powerful; great, heavy beamed antlers, that forked as mule deer antlers fork, in a "Y" and refork again in the same pattern.

During early summer, when blood vessels still were feeding rich antler-building juice into the velvety knobs on his head, the big buck had followed solitary trails, far back in high, timberline country. There were limey licks up there, the forage was rich in calcium, and because he was six years old, in life's prime, this mineral in his diet had gathered into the growing horns. But the blood vessels had dried up, the nerve ends in the soft horns had gone, as the rock-hardness came and the velvet covering shredded away.

He was strong. He was equipped to fight. He wanted to fight. He had chased a doe the night before, panting, bawling a little in eagerness. He had caught up with her, beating her to a standstill with antlers and slashing hoofs. But another buck, a right large fellow, with a good set of antlers, had come charging. So they had fought. After the big buck, with his thick, many-tined antlers had caught the other fellow on a down-hill slope, and had tossed him over a ten-foot cliff, twisting his neck until he slipped and toppled, the doe was gone.

The battle surge took hold now. The big buck raced back a little, to where some willows stood thick with roots in a seep spring. He lunged at the willows, grunting low in his thickening neck. The willows sprang back and lashed at him. It incited him to more fierce attack. He plunged, ripping the bark in long, tossing sweeps of his head. The bared stems of willow wood showed nakedly white in the deepening dusk. He hit them again, tearing and thrashing, parrying and thrusting.

That's the way he'd do it if some buck got in his way. Get tines under flank or belly. Lift. Back away, and lunge. Find a soft, hurting underside of that other buck that now was simulated by tight willow clump, and he'd gore him. Thrust. Jab. Rip. Tear. If any buck thought he could fight it out with the big buck, just let him tie into it. He was strong; nothing in his domain could down him.

He turned panting from the mock battle, stepped to the lookout point again, gazing down at the ranch. He lifted his head swiftly, nostrils distended. There was the whiff of another deer on the breeze; a doe. The big buck turned with hackles on his neck bristling.

After one glance down to where the ranch lay, where the lights of a car wobbled to a stop among the buildings, the big buck stuck out his nose, upper lip wrinkling, and began a fast, low-hunched run, following the scent on the slow night breeze.

IT didn't concern the big buck one whit at the moment, that there were men down at the Paison Ranch all set to start gunning for him—or that there were a couple of men there that, by all signs, could be thinking of gunning for each other.

The car the big buck had seen roll in to the ranch had brought both Lacey and Carl Simmons. They were out of the car and standing in the beam of the headlamps when Dan Poe came up to them and called softly to Carl.

"You darned fool," said Dan, "you make a perfect target in them lights."

"No open season on wardens, that I've heard of," replied Carl.

"Thought it was always open," replied Dan. "Better figure that way. What you fellows up to; this sociable call or business?"

"Mixed," said Lacey "All your hunters got licenses?"

"One who came this noon maybe hasn't; I've checked the others."

"We'll fix 'im up," said Lacey.

They went under the peeled pine log over the porch entrance, past the plank door with the road-runner design, into the log-walled living room. Heads turned. Nivens, the drawling, stringy surgeon from Nashville, hailed Lacey, came from where the others sat around the card table, and shook hands. Introductions were made. Truitt wasn't there. Then he came in the door, filling it He stopped as he saw Carl Simmons.

"You didn't let the trail grow cold, did you?" he said, looking at Carl.

"You ain't got your license," cut in Dan. "The wardens can fix you up. Got to have a license y'know, to do any hunting."

Truitt grunted, and dragged out a fat billfold, still looking at Carl. The latter just stood easily, regarding the big man. The others, Rath the accountant, a spare, faded fellow who could stand up to any trail, Rogers the bald-headed architect, Mason, the fat meat packer from Des Moines, had met Truitt at supper Now they were weighing him out. Mason turned his back and played a card, and the others turned away as though to suggest cards were more interesting than the big truck operator.

"Entitles you to one deer, hunter's choice," said Lacey handing over the pink cardboard license.

"I'll make my choice," said Truitt. "And don't any badge-decorated individuals get important and tell me how or when or what I'll be shooting."

There was an odd pause, then Lacey said, "If we can help any of you boys, holler. Got to roll back to get that checking station operating. Some before-season sport's sure to show up about daylight tomorrow with a deer he shot ten minutes earlier up the road—only the carcass will be three days or so in the woods and stiff as a board. We want to welcome any of them pre-season sports. Be seein' you."

Carl Simmons lifted a hand to the group at the card table, smiled slightly at Dan, and walked almost over Truitt's toes without apparently seeing the big fellow.

It hung that way, sort of tense and strung up, when the gang hit the trail before daylight, riding toward the rim over a side-canyon trail. Every man at the ranch sensed the situation between Truitt and Carl Simmons. Dan let the others pair off or go singly, or line up for a drive, or however they chose to hunt, because he could trust them alone on the mesa. He had decided Truitt shouldn't be left alone; for good and sufficient reasons.

"There's an extra hundred bucks if you can guide me to one good shot at the big trophy animal," Truitt said

"You're paying regular rate," said Dan, a bit testily. "Anyone that does gets all the service we can give."

"Make it two hundred and fifty." Truitt sounded as though he were bidding at an auction.

"Make it five thousand," said Dan. "Let's don't be small about it."

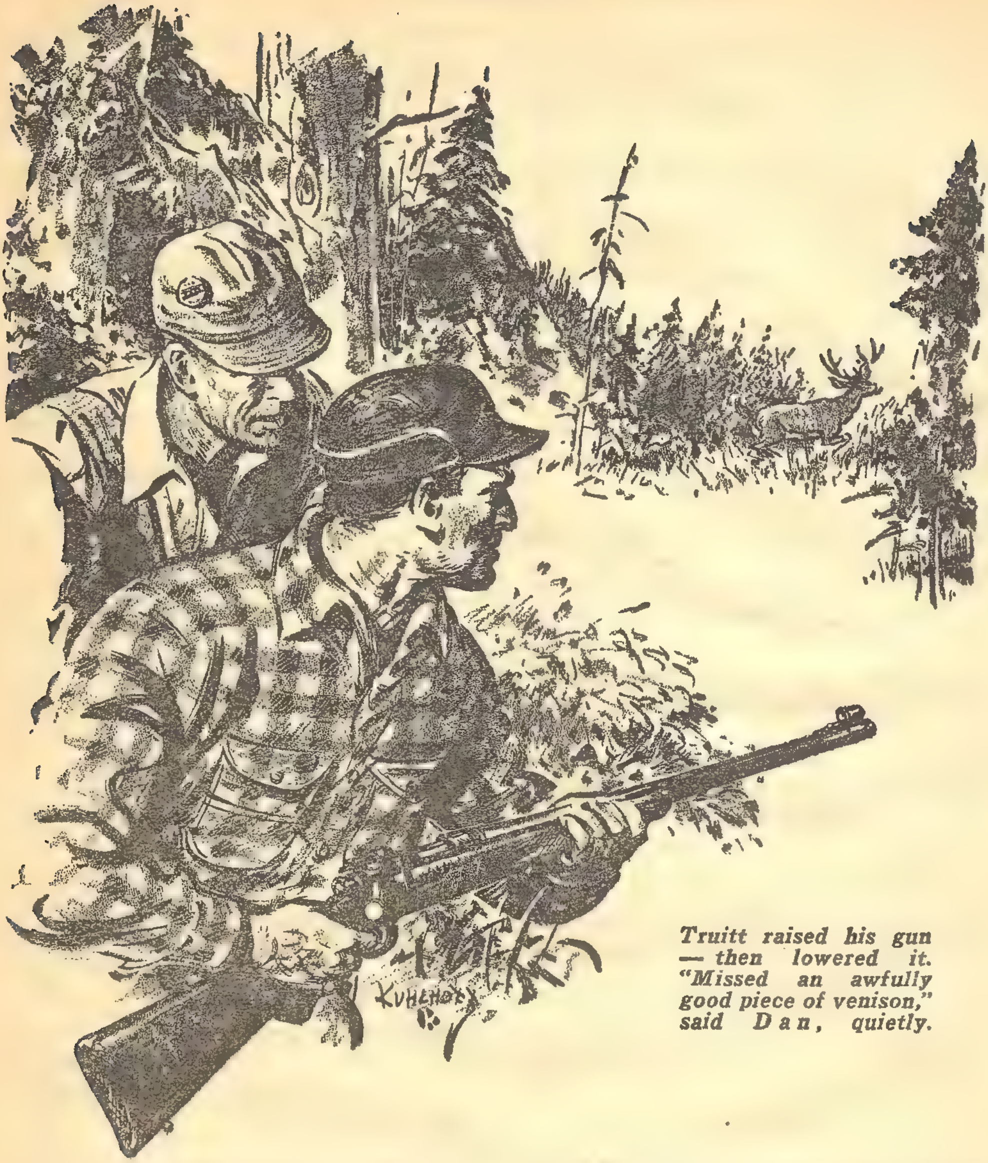
Truitt started to retort, snapped his mouth shut, and they rode in the fading dusk of dawn. Dan knew how the others would be hunting at daybreak of the first day; a circle to get to the long patch of timber that stood around the northeast slope of Rocky Knob. They'd start working that, with a couple riding in the timber, driving; the others above and below the timber strip, where shots would shape up if deer broke into the open. He led Truitt to where any deer spooked out and in the clear, would probably run into a rocky draw, heading for timber to the south. It was good as any point for a chance shot at the big buck; Dan had seen tracks of the big one there during late summer.

A chickaree squirrel began to chatter far up on Rocky Knob's timbered sides; then another took it up. The little sentinels of western woods were yelling their best that invaders were on the march. Shooting light was only a minute away. A high-power blasted far over toward the east side of Mirror Mesa; just one shot. Good shooting or a clean miss. Dan nodded approval.

Then a gun spoke nearer; one, two, three, four, five, six. One in the chamber, all the magazine. Some wild greenie with a lot of buck fever, Dan decided. He'd seen them do just this, pumping each shot into the air or the ground in front of 'em, and swearing every shot hit the target.

There was a little sound back of Dan and Truitt where they crouched. A big buck was sneaking along the edge of the oak brush. Truitt raised his gun—then lowered it. The buck slid into the brush.

"Missed an awfully good piece of venison," said Dan, quietly.



Truitt raised his gun — then lowered it. "Missed an awfully good piece of venison," said Dan, quietly.

"It wasn't the big buck," said Truitt. "And if I shot this close to the others before they start working the timber, I'd blow any chance they have. I just didn't want to bid for that one, so I passed."

Dan looked at the big guy. That sounded a lot like there was some sporting ethics in him. Then two shots shook the dawn, coming from the direction of Bald Knob.

"That's Mason," said Dan, positively. "He's the only one packing a thirty-five special. He's filled his license."

Dawn flooded, spreading into canyon shadows. Truitt kept sweeping the breaks and thickets with his glasses; powerful binocs. Ten o'clock came, and the others would be swinging back toward the ranch, to hunt again later in the afternoon.

Truitt handed the glasses to Dan, and said to look at a certain spot in a little dip in the rim. The powerful lenses brought the spot almost within throwing distance. The big buck was standing, shaded up beside an old cedar, across a split in the mesa. Dan had had glimpses of those antlers before, but this magnified look made his skin draw tight.

"Any way to get around there?" asked Truitt, and Dan noticed his voice was steady.

"Three miles back, then a trail down across the draw, and cut back three miles again."

Truitt nodded, kept looking through the glasses for some moments, put them in the case, and said, "Might as well go in. Got a look at him. I'm not going to have a try at him until I get a clean shot; a sure one. I make my shots good, or I don't shoot, Dan."

Dan Poe scratched his chin. Maybe Truitt wasn't one of the bunch, but he hadn't grabbed his magnum and started blasting across that half mile gully, as a common greenhorn would.

TRUITT was on the prod each following morning, ready and waiting to begin the climb to the top. Dawn found them easing into position on tinkered saddles along low ridges, or the edge of forest patches in straight walled draws. The others hunted together but Dan kept trailing with Truitt. For several reasons. If Truitt could land that trophy head, he might pack up and get out. If he didn't, more than likely Carl Simmons would be riding Mirror Mesa; checking camps and what was happening. It was the others; Nivens the surgeon, Rath the accountant, Rogers the architect, Mason, the pudgy packer, that connected with good big buck deer. And when they had filled, they and the others at Paison, pulled out.

That wasn't regular. Generally they stuck around and wound up the season, watching the drama of others hunting, soaking up the spirit of the big country. Maybe the others had hunted more determinedly and taken first chances to get their venison instead of selecting good heads and extra prime venison as they had in the past. Dan didn't know, but he guessed. They didn't care to be around the big truck-line man.

Truitt had sensed the gap between himself and the rest, and had made friendly gestures toward companionship. He hadn't gotten very far. Several days of the freeze-out had made him silent, dogged and a bit sullen. On the trail, he wasn't that way with Dan Poe; not exactly. All along the way, Dan had to admit, Truitt was acting like a genuine sportsman. But he was about the most determined, one-goal hunter that had ever ridden out from the Paison. And a bear for trying; at dawn break or as darkness came. Word came that the big buck had been taken by a cowboy from the T Lazy R over on the west side of the mesa. Instead of resting at noon that day, ready for the evening hunting time, Truitt had ridden to see the big deer. He came back with a relieved bit of a grin on his face.

"Wasn't the big buck," he told Dan. "Big one but not *the* one. I know. The big buck has two abnormal tines sticking down toward his face, like caribou antlers. This one didn't have those tines."

They heard of one hunter being killed by another. News of tragedy travels fast over wide spaces during game season.

"Accidental, of course," Truitt had remarked, with a jeering glitter in his eyes.

"Sometimes," admitted Dan. "Occasionally it is accidental on purpose."

"Yeah," said Truitt. "Yeah, that could happen with some people."

Dan wished then he hadn't made the remark. He knew of one range feud that had ended in a hunting season "accident." Never could prove anything, but everyone knew.

They had seen the tracks of the big buck; more square-toed than any doe, not directly in line because his thick body swedged his legs out a bit, wide between the toes and deep, indicating he was heavy. They had come across a place where the buck had horned a patch of red dogwood in mock battle; another bit of sign showing a fight with another buck. A pattern of where the big buck moved was beginning to shape up. But the season was running out.

Neither Lacey nor Simmons had come by the ranch again. But Dan had heard of their swinging through camps on the Mesa. Could be Truitt would get out of the country, after the season closed on the Mesa, when only the post-season over in Ute County to the southwest remained on. Unless a whale of a storm came in, driving the deer down country, there'd be no hunting in the post-season area—and there needed to be to reduce the herd there.

Dan Poe stepped out of the main house and headed toward the small, detached cabin Truitt had all to himself. A knock on the door and Truitt called for him to come in. For a moment the light blinded Dan, then he saw the eight-cartridge clip on the table; a clip full of ammo for a Garand semi-automatic rifle.

"Where'd you get that stuff?" he asked, bluntly.

"Oh, that," said Truitt. "Just Army hang-over that got in my gun cases."

"Not legal for big game hunting," said Dan.

"You don't say," said Truitt, smoothly. "Look, Dan, there's just one day left. I've set my heart on taking a record—"

"We can try; one more full day. In spite of all that's shaped up, Truitt, I must say you've been a good enough sportsman and I'd like to see you connect. I thought for a minute you might figure on using that automatic rifle. Deadline's close, but we'll have a try."

"Thanks," said Truitt, slowly. "Thanks, Dan. I know I'm in bad in a lot of ways. Maybe it's all the years back of me; slugging my way up from a second-hand truck with a mortgage big as the truck itself to head of this business I've got. Not much sporting ethics about battling your way to the top in that kind of business. Maybe it's left its impression on me; more than I realized. One thing —" He paused, then said, "One thing, if any bozo gets in my way when I start out to do something I've decided I'd do, I don't know any fine points of strategy. I just slug it through. It's the way I've had to do."

They were silent a moment, and Dan had a strange feeling of charity toward the big guy who had slugged and fought and gone head-on through the center, and didn't know how else to get his goals. In one clear, quick panorama, Dan Poe sensed the effort Truitt had made to hold to sportsmen's ethics. He'd done pretty well—but it was hard going. Anything might tear loose the ethics he had maintained.

"Better get some rest," said Dan. "We'll start half an hour earlier tomorrow. I'll call you if I don't see a light in your cabin.

Outside there was a crying wind scurrying up the canyon, and the moaning of racing currents of high air channels came down from the rimrocks. Dan turned his face against the chill stream and felt the storm coming. It wouldn't come fast enough to give tracking snow this last day and give Truitt a better chance at the big trophy. But storm rode the winds.

CHAPTER III

LOCKED HORNS

ALL the effort in hours of days just past, stacked into the ride as Truitt and Dan Poe struck toward the mesa top. Last day; last chance. The puffing of the horses, the creak of saddles, the click of rocks knocked by shod hoofs blended with the sighing sound in the pines where wind streaked through needles and twigs.

There was no faint glow in the sky as they topped the rim rock. No stars. Blobs of black were evergreen stands. A limey cliff showed ghostly, faintly, as they passed. Some wild thing jumped away from the trail, crashing in fright as it dived into oak brush. A coyote, feasting on a wounded deer that had been dragged down, lifted his nose and sang a witch's roundelay. Another answered, far away. Then only the trail sounds and the wind's whimpering filled the blackness.

A thin trickle of light came into the sky as they swung the head of the branch canyon, heading to the point where they had seen the big buck that first day, far across the straight-walled rift in the mesa mass. They'd tried this before, seen the sign of the big buck on the far side of this rough little canyon, but only tracks. But deer are creatures of habit and if the big buck had found that lookout point a good one in former days, he'd consider it safe again.

"Get down to that ledge where we were Tuesday," said Dan. "You know the one; just follow this game trail. If the buck's back by that old cedar again, you'll have a clean shot. I'll swing to the rim farther on; head him back if he spooks and runs that way. If he comes the other way, he'll be charging right at you."

They swung apart. Dan's horse picked a way through rocks and scrub brush. Safely back of a little ridge, on a grassy stretch, he kicked his horse into a trot. Light was coming fast, but it was an eerie dawn; stormy. A few flakes of wind-tossed snow came drifting into his face as he swung the horse toward a point out from the flat. From that spot he could overlook the ledge where Truitt would be waiting for shooting light and the route the big buck would take if he ran away along the main rim.

Dan looked into the hazy country west. There was no glowing tip on the La Sal Mountains; not even the dim mass of the big hills for clouds were tangled around the peaks. Advance guard clouds of what was riding in from the northwest. Big snow; first of the season, long delayed, and big. Still some hours away.

He turned to look back toward the place where Truitt should be crouching on the ledge, waiting for the light. Well back, along the head of the side canyon, another rider was moving toward Truitt. Dan Poe strained his eyes; grabbed at his glasses; then after one look, scrambled into the saddle.

The light wasn't good enough to see details, but he knew the outlines of the man and the way he rode. Carl Simmons was riding in on Truitt; Indian savvy and ability to read trail sign almost in the dark, was taking the game warden in to a meeting.

Dan Poe couldn't hurry his horse on the short-cut he took. But it was quicker than following the longer, safer trail over which he had come. Whatever was pointing up in the growing light of gray morning, Dan Poe had to get there to bust it up—quick.

He came into a point where a low, eight-foot rimrock blocked the way. There was no time to hunt a place where the rim broke and he could ride down. He tossed the reins on the ground, knowing the horse would rein-tie, and slipped over the edge of the cliff. He was masked from seeing what was developing down the trail, but he heard Carl Simmons' horse stop, and knew the warden was moving in on foot.

Brush in the way prevented Dan Poe from seeing ahead until he came to where the rock top of the ledge sloped up to an overlook point. He saw Truitt scramble to his feet. A wind gust brought voices but garbled the words.

FOR a moment, while Dan Poe ran with boot-heels clacking on rising rock, the two men stood, as though they were about to throw themselves at each other. Then with a quick, slashing move, Carl Simmons wrenched away the gun Truitt held.

Truitt made a move, reaching. Carl made a sweep with the clubbed gun, and Truitt jerked back.

They were standing there, breathing deep, wordless but boiling with a conflict ready to spill over, as Dan Poe panted to a stop, getting a little between them.

"Hold it," he ordered. "You two; hold it. What's going on?"

"Look," said Carl Simmons, holding the gun. It was the semi-automatic, fast firing military weapon; the one to take the ammo Dan had seen in Truitt's cabin the night before.

"Illegal," said Dan, flatly.

"Totally," said Carl. "Only a bull-headed head hunter would use this gun."

"If you think you can arrest me, go ahead," snapped Truitt. "I'll fight you in the courts—give me that rifle, you lousy, welching punk! And arrest me if you think you can make it stick!"

"Hold your hands up," Carl brought the muzzle of the gun up to train on Truitt. "Now make one funny move. Just one."

"It'll be plain murder, Carl," said Dan.

"Ride easy," said Carl. "It isn't murder, yet. I'd have to knock you off, Dan, as a witness and I wouldn't relish that." He laughed, dryly. "Keep your hands up, Truitt."

Slowly the big man raised his hands. Carl slipped back of him, searched him, picked up four more clips of automatic ammo and slipped them in his pocket. Then he ejected the clip in the rifle and pocketed it.

"You knew that weapon was illegal,

Truitt," he said, and handed it back to the big man. "But you ought to know that I wouldn't let you get away with using such a gun shooting any big buck—or a man."

The warden turned, and walked up the trail. Truitt half raised the automatic rifle; lowered it. Dan could see the white in his face, the sweat that cold wind couldn't wipe off. If there had been ammunition in the gun that moment, Truitt might have committed murder; it was plain written on his big face, and in his eyes.

"You had it coming to you," said Dan, shortly.

"It was the last day," whispered Truitt. "And I told that fellow not to mess up what I came here to do. I told him."

They heard the warden's horse break into a trot up the trail. Dan looked again at Truitt; then beyond.

"Behind you," he half whispered.

Truitt pivoted. Not fifty yards away, a clear target, standing just outside a patch of brush was the big buck.

His head was raised. The majestic spread of antlers were a proud, heavy-beamed crown. Only the big ears of the buck moved as he stood statue-still. A second dragged; another started grinding by. Plenty of time for a clean shot by any marksman.

Then the big buck whirled, leaped, snorted, and they listened to the "brump, brump, brump" of his leaps back toward the escape route along the rim where Dan had planned to turn him if he went that way.

With a snort of disgust, T. Cressman Truitt flung the automatic rifle out over the edge of the little canyon. He listened to the last clatter as it fell.

"Let's get back and get my other rifle," he said as he started up the trail. "Sometimes I think I'm some sort of a fool. Let's get going."

THE rest of the day was man-killing riding, under a lead-colored sky, with the outriders of the storm, the wind and raveled clouds, ripping over the mesa top. They picked up the trail of the big buck, followed it where he had made twenty-foot leaps after first fright, then the deep-jabbed marks where he slowed to a trot. He didn't circle, but headed over the mesa, as though going toward lower country, under pressure of storm and fear.

They had to turn back as the trail dropped into a side-canyon far to the southwest. Truitt was silent, almost morose, and after dinner, went to his cabin before Dan Poe could get a chance to talk to him. The light in the cabin was out as Dan did start over to find what Truitt's plans might be, and he turned back. With the season closed, with that tight, clashing moment on the ledge past, Dan Poe knew he ought to feel an easing of the tension that had roweled through him all season—because of Truitt. But it wasn't lessening. Some way, accounts hadn't balanced.

Dawn came with a nasty, snow-flurried wind sucking up past the Paison Ranch and raking over the rimrock. Truitt didn't show up when the breakfast bell jingled. After a little wait, Dan stumped over to the cabin to call him. There was no answer from within. He opened the door. Truitt wasn't there. He checked the high-power rifle that had stood each night in the corner. It was gone.

Dan headed toward the corrals. Truitt's horse, his saddle, were gone. Some dim tracks, heading toward the high mesa were in the skin of snow on the ground.

They were a bit dimmer, with the fresh wash of light snow when Dan hit up the trail on a fresh horse, following. If the storm caught Truitt on top, there was every chance he'd go over the cliffs, or ride to a place where he'd stop, and the snow would drift while he sank into a deadly sleep. This was no minor storm; it was the snow-in blizzard. The crazy fool!

Season over, too. Closed at last shooting light, night before. Simmons still was around; probably up on top trying to finish cripples before the main storm poured in. Sorry for Truitt; kinda sorry. But the big, bull-headed fool had stacked most of his difficulties up for himself!

At the top of the rimrock, Dan Poe looked at the trail. Then he kicked his horse into a trot, even on the slow upgrade.

There were tracks of two horses in the trail. One was about thirty minutes fresh-er than the other. At the point where he'd seen the second hoof marks start following the one ahead, Dan had noticed how the second rider swung in on the trail as it came over the rim, how the rider had halted a moment, while his horse danced a little, and then how the second tracks had followed on top of the first.

Simmons. Now following Truitt. Maybe the warden didn't know who he was following, but he'd be certain it was someone slopping over into illegal hunting, the day after the season closed.

The sun tried to break through, succeeded for a few moments, then lost the battle. The wind was beginning to iron out the tracks almost as they were made, but Dan knew which direction Truitt would take; which trail. The big man was heading for where they last had seen the big buck tracks the night before, and with tracking snow now skinned over the ground, if he could pick up the tracks, he'd be able to follow—if the main storm held off.

Occasionally Dan could see ahead. But he glimpsed no rider. He traveled fast. Those ahead were riding hard.

Once he got on the wrong trail, and had to cut sign to pick it up again. Then he rode with uneasiness spurring him, the beating thought that if these two men met, out there in the swirl of storm, all pent-up feeling might explode. They seemed ripe to kill, both of them. Both were good shots. It might be both killed, if they tangled.

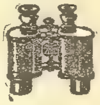
He reached the place where the top of the mesa began to slope down a little, toward Ute County side. The trail splayed out, the snow came gusting in to blind vision, and he lost trail again.

The horse he rode turned away from a cold squall. For several minutes, Dan Poe felt the bewilderment of a man in country totally unfamiliar. He spurred his horse toward where the trail should be, down over the rimrock. When the snow shower cleared, so he could see a trail he was following, there were no tracks in it. Snow just fallen could account for that. He was below the rim. The trail wound down. He was getting on toward where he should be closing in on the two men ahead. Still there was no sign in the trail. For a moment, another streamer of snow blinded him, and it was then that his horse halted, snorting.

Dimly, just a few feet ahead, the trail ended in what must have been a bedding grounds for deer; a blind trail, with a forty-foot cliff dropping down below. Wrong trail. He was boxed; couldn't go ahead. The main trail was over somewhere else. Only way down into this canyon, and he'd have to get back to it to again follow Truitt and Simmons.

Again the sun burned through the boil of the clouds. It cut a misty shaft down through the uneasy air, lighting a part of the canyon below.

Dan fumbled out his glasses. In a quick sweep, he caught the moving figures below. Part way down the real trail to the bottom, in a section where aspen and open spaces were intermingled, he saw Truitt, riding as though following a fresh sign. Behind, several hundred yards to the rear, was Carl Simmons.



AS HE watched, Dan saw Simmons ride to an overlook point, halt, and seem to be peering ahead. The warden could look down on Truitt and the trail ahead, with the parky spaces all in view. Even as he watched, Carl Simmons raised his rifle and fired. Truitt's horse jumped; whirled and danced. Truitt saw Simmons then. He was dragging at his own gun; then seemed to decide differently. He was in the open, and a clear target. Simmons was back of a rock breastwork.

Truitt headed his horse down country. The trail took him into a thicket of aspen timber. He rode through it. Simmons shot again. Dan held his breath, expecting to see Truitt tumble out of the saddle. It was a wonder the big man didn't. Carl was a dead shot; strange he missed even on second try.

Dan Poe yelled. It was useless. The wind was flooding up the canyon, carrying the sound of shots below, carrying Dan's voice back over the mesa.

The false trail had brought Dan Poe to a point where he was forced to be a spectator only. He could see the drama below, see the detail through his field glasses. It would all be over by the time he could reach either of the men by riding back to the top and down the main trail.

Dan saw the first solid curtain of blizzard snow come into the mouth of the canyon. It was coming swiftly; only a matter of minutes before it would cut in on the rim country and wash across the mesa top. He sat the saddle in full frustration.

The glasses again. He looked at Carl, crouching on the ledge, rifle half raised. Then at Truitt.

Suddenly, Truitt piled out of the saddle. He had not fired a shot at Carl. He pointed his high-power down canyon. There was a jerk in Truitt's body, seen clearly through the glasses; then the report of the gun. Truitt started running, on foot, toward the edge of an aspen patch.

Then Dan Poe saw what had happened; the big buck had come out of the timber, almost into Truitt's lap. And the big animal was down!

Truitt was unsheathing his hunting knife, leaping at the buck that struggled.

"Don't do that, you fool!" Dan was shouting, but to himself. Truitt had laid his gun down on a rock twenty feet away from where he was bending over to stick the buck. "You fool!" Dan heard himself yelling; didn't know he was shouting into the wind.

The buck struggled. Truitt jumped with knife thrusting. The big animal rose, lunging, and Truitt was fending off the horns. Then Truitt was down; and the buck was floundering, weaving, whirling. But Truitt was down, dragging himself, slowly, trying to get to his feet, out of the way of the groggy buck that was attempting to locate his enemy again, in spite of death darkness clouding his vision.

The clatter of a horse racing down the trail recklessly, came up on the puffing wind. Carl was gone from the ledge; he was into the first park, and running his horse headlong. The buck was staggering, as though summoning a final bit of strength to finish off the man. The great antlers lowered toward Truitt in the first move of a death charge.

Truitt was reaching out for his gun; hunching, hunching toward it. He had his hand out, and it was only a few feet to where he could get hold of the stock. The buck began a stiff-legged walk preliminary to his running charge. Carl Simmons threw his horse to a sliding stop, leaping to the ground with rifle in hand. He raised his sights very deliberately.

Truitt had reached his gun. The buck had started his run.

Blinding, masking, pulling a curtain of blank white over the scene, the snow came. One instant the drama was clear in the big glasses in Dan Poe's hands.

The next there was nothing but advancing white.

Then one shot blasted up through the canyon, twisted and muffled by storm and wind. One shot and only one.

For a moment Dan Poe sat numb and questioning. Then the whip-lash of the charging blizzard cut him to bring him to his senses.

He whirled his horse around. The climb back to the rim was guided more by the pony's instinct than any trail. They reached the top. The moaning of the winds in trees under the rim mixed with the hissing scud of snow that was sweeping across the top of the mesa like a thin flood. He tried once, twice, to find the notch where the trail got down off the rim-rock into the canyon. The horse kept turning, away from the beating of the storm.

The storm was coming thicker, faster, heavier. With the realization that he had to move before it, angling, back to where he could get down on the trail to the Paison, Dan Poe turned his horse and headed for home.

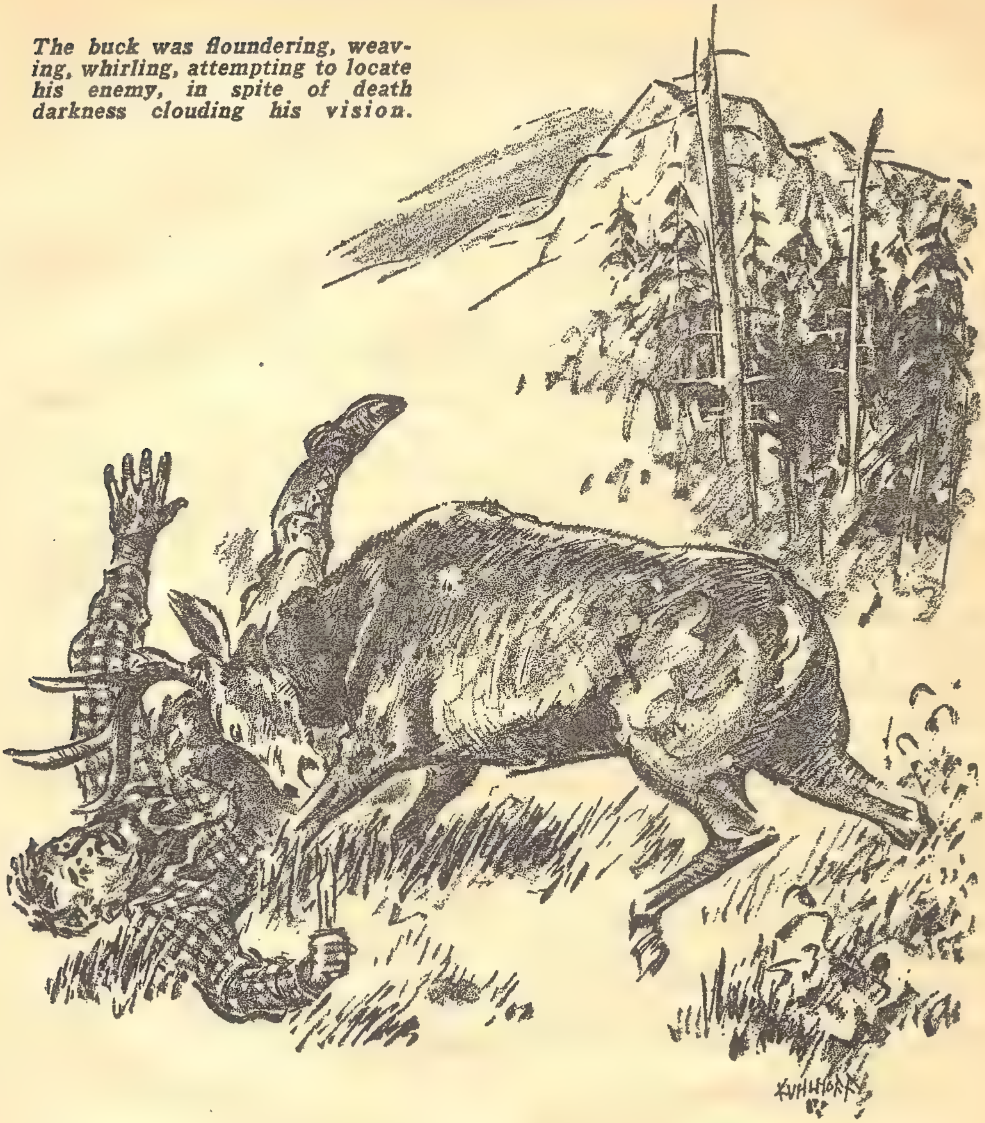
He had to save himself first. And if he did get through to headquarters, he could telephone to bring help in from below—and the law along with it.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAST SHOT

THE storm gibbered under the eaves of the Paison ranch house. It hummed in the pines. It chortled as it splashed against the buttresses of the rimrock and climbed in vaulting rushes to mass in a gigantic charge across the top of Mirror Mesa.

Dan Poe paced before the big stone fireplace. He had tried to get through on the telephone. The line was down; it was that way, seemingly, whenever emergency hit. Drifts would block the side highway to



The buck was floundering, weaving, whirling, attempting to locate his enemy, in spite of death darkness clouding his vision.

the Paison; it might be a day or two before any wheeled vehicle could get out to Mochila or any other point where word could go into the county seat or some spot where men could gather and go driving into the far canyon, the other side of the mesa, to find the answer to that last, single shot—where it hit.

One shot, one shot only, meant target had been hit; no need for a second shot. The question was who had pulled the trigger and what target had been hit.

The day dragged along to a snow-misted twilight. The fading light that fought through clouds and falling snow, began to forecast a night of bleak snow-whitened blackness. For the hundredth time Dan Poe tried to see out; in any direction. No use. Vision was limited to less than a hundred yards. He cranked the phone. Still dead. He made another trip to the horse barn and corrals; saw to it that the stock was taken care of for the night. Beat his way back to the main house. Light was going out of the sky more swiftly.

The ranch crew waited up with Dan Poe, waiting for someone to come, maybe;

they didn't know who, but someone might come. They talked in short, indifferent sentences, that masked thoughts.

"All right," said Dan Poe finally. "Let's break it up and get some rest. We may be bucking the drifts tomorrow, going after at least one frozen man."

Getting rest was good advice. Dan Poe couldn't follow it. He reached for sleep, caught a few naps, but was staring out of the window before dawn light came. The three riders for the Paison were getting strung out to ride. They'd take turns breaking trail; tough going for horses and men. Breakfast would be over before it was light enough to judge whether men and horses had a fair chance to get through.

Dan turned away from the night-blanked window. The telephone still rang dead. He went back to the window.

Someone shouted out in the storm. It was a ghostly call, but human. Dan slammed out of the doorway, beyond the shelter of the porch, where the droning storm hit him on all sides. He yelled. There was an answer; closer than the first call.

He plunged toward the voice. As he did, he shouted for the crew, and hoped they heard. Then he saw the figures come out of the storm-gripped darkness.

A man leading a horse. Simmons. Something in the saddle; tied in. Simmons was slogging, slowly, as though each footstep was a separate command.

"Truitt in the saddle," said Simmons harshly. "Dead or alive—I brought him in."

The figure in the saddle was lashed in. His left leg was in a crude splint. They yanked at the stiff ropes that lashed Truitt in the saddle, lifted him out, and carried him inside; then peeled snow-stiffened clothes off the big man. Simmons went toward the kitchen, asking for hot coffee.

"Easy," said Dan, as they stretched Truitt on a bed. "Watch that leg; don't let it twist any."

Carl Simmons came to the door as they got Truitt stretched out, and said, "Better do what you can to set that leg, Dan, while he's unconscious. Be tough business if he wakes up—or is he dead?"

"Breathing—I guess." Dan Poe listened to the rattling in Truitt's flattened nostrils. "You fellows will have to help me get those bones pulled end-to-end. Let's go."

It was no easy chore; Truitt's muscles were heavy, but it was a clean break. Dan Poe was sweating when the job was done. Truitt groaned, then lay quiet, breathing hard. Dan couldn't tell whether the last of that punishment had been with Truitt half-conscious, feeling pain and gritting through it, or not. If he had, anyone who could take such gaff and not cry out, had guts.

The big man opened one eye, and asked, "Simmons?"

"He's around," said Dan Poe. "Take it easy."

Dan wondered if that question about the warden came from the old bitterness or something that had gone on in the storm. He went to ask Carl Simmons. But the warden was gone; so was a fresh horse from the stable.

THE storm eased as the morning drifted into mid-forenoon. Truitt had short periods of consciousness, but lay with eyes closed much of the time. Once when he seemed more alert, Dan put a question.

"What happened down there? It's all tangled up and I can't figure it."

"Can't figure it either," said Truitt. "Won't know the score until Simmons shows up."

They waited for Simmons; it might be a long wait. He might not be coming back. The Indian in him might be guiding his actions, and no telling what direction.

Dan and the others were eating in the kitchen, where the roaring ranch stove gave good heat, when they heard Simmons stomping on the front porch. He grinned as he came across the threshold, slapping his hands.

"Wish someone would take over with the horses," he suggested, "and just throw that load on the porch."

The warden went on to the kitchen; more coffee and food this time. He ate silently, while Dan sat across the table, not asking questions. No use to question Carl; he'd talk when he got ready; not before.

"Get me up when Truitt wakes," said Carl. He stretched on the floor, sprawled on the bear-skin covered couch beside the fireplace, and slipped directly into sleep.

Dan went over to look out on the porch, where Carl had said to dump the load from the second horse.

Majestic in still, frozen death, the giant antlered head of the big buck stood beside the log pillars of the porch. Evidence, thought Dan, that'll hang it on Truitt; and I'm a witness.

The afternoon had begun to drag, there were patches of feeble sunlight breaking through the clouds to splash over two feet of snow that had poured in, when Carl Simmons sat up.

"Truitt awake?" he demanded.

"Have a look," suggested Dan.

Simmons opened the door, and Truitt, wide-awake said, "You always show up—all right. Tell me I'm arrested for shooting out of season. I'll pay, or if they slap me in clink, I'll serve the sentence. Go ahead."

"Got to clear up just a few details, first, Truitt," said Carl, as he turned, went to the porch, and came back lugging the big, near-record deer head. He set it down near the bed where Truitt lay. For a moment the big truck man stared at the giant trophy.

"And I suppose the law'll confiscate that, along with socking a fine on me for out-of-season hunting," said Truitt. "But I've got a side to it too; you were pot-shooting at me just before I downed the buck. We'll draw cards, and see who plays this out to get the biggest share of chips."

"The game's all played to the last draw," said Carl, slowly. "Trophy's yours, Truitt. There's no charge against you. When you shot the big buck you were about a hundred yards across the line into Ute County, and the season's still open there—post-season and it's all legal. You ought to know that if I'd been shooting at you in earnest, from where I was, I'd have nailed you."

"But you shot awfully close," said Truitt. "What in . . . ?"

"Two reasons." Carl smiled slightly. "I saw the big buck just down canyon, and I wanted to keep you going in that direction to catch up with him—and to get you over the line, where season is still open. The deer was pocketed against some cliffs. The nearest cover was ahead, where you'd try to hide and run into the big buck—so I herded you that way."

Truitt stared—then, "I don't get it!"

"Trophy's yours, you took it legally, no charges will be filed—and somehow I figure you had the trophy coming to you."

"I still don't get it; why you hauled me in, dragged in the head—all this business. It's cock-eyed after what's been between us, Simmons."

"You mean Larry Johnson getting shot in the back—on that jungle road. Sure. That *was* between us. But they operated on Johnson, took out the bullet that's been in his back, and this ought to interest you, Captain—it wasn't a U. S. bullet. It was a six and five-tenths millimeter slug, fired from an Arisaka."

"Enemy sniper," said Truitt, almost to himself. "Sniper shot Johnson just before I knocked off that sniper. And Johnson'd probably died if you hadn't taken him to first aid." Simmons nodded. Truitt was frowning in deep thought.

"Y'see," said Carl Simmons as though he must help the big trucker understand, "I got the letter about Johnson last night. I was riding the short-cut trail trying to beat the storm so I could tell you and get our war settled when I picked up your trail at the top of the rimrock. Knew it was you; only a bull-headed guy would ride out as the storm started. So I lit in after you—and finally caught up."

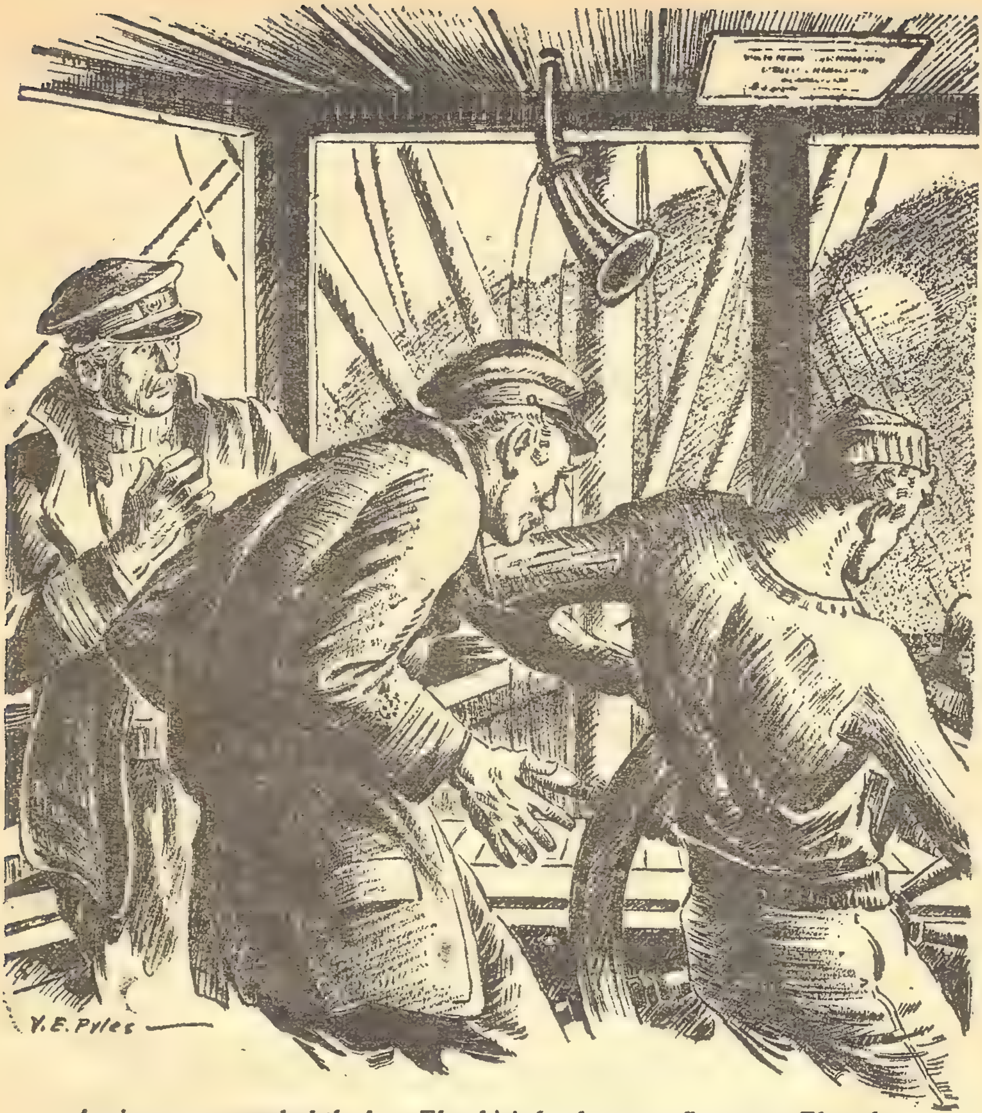
"Humans get awfully tangled up on things, sometimes," Truitt said. "Sometimes it takes a wholesale beating to get 'em straightened out . . . How's about planning right now, to do some riding together next hunting season, you and me, Carl? Seems we sort of struggled through together this time."

"Sounds all right," said Carl Simmons.

"Johnson," said Truitt abruptly. "That kid ought to be in on it, if he's strong enough, he's been tangled into this mess. Write him, will you, Carl? Tell him if he's well enough to hunt next year, he's my guest at the Paison."

"Looks like I'll have to put up a new cabin, to take care of a couple more sportsmen next fall," said Dan Poe.

"It's a contract," said Truitt, with a grin on his big face, "that should read: 'For one buck—and other considerations.' "

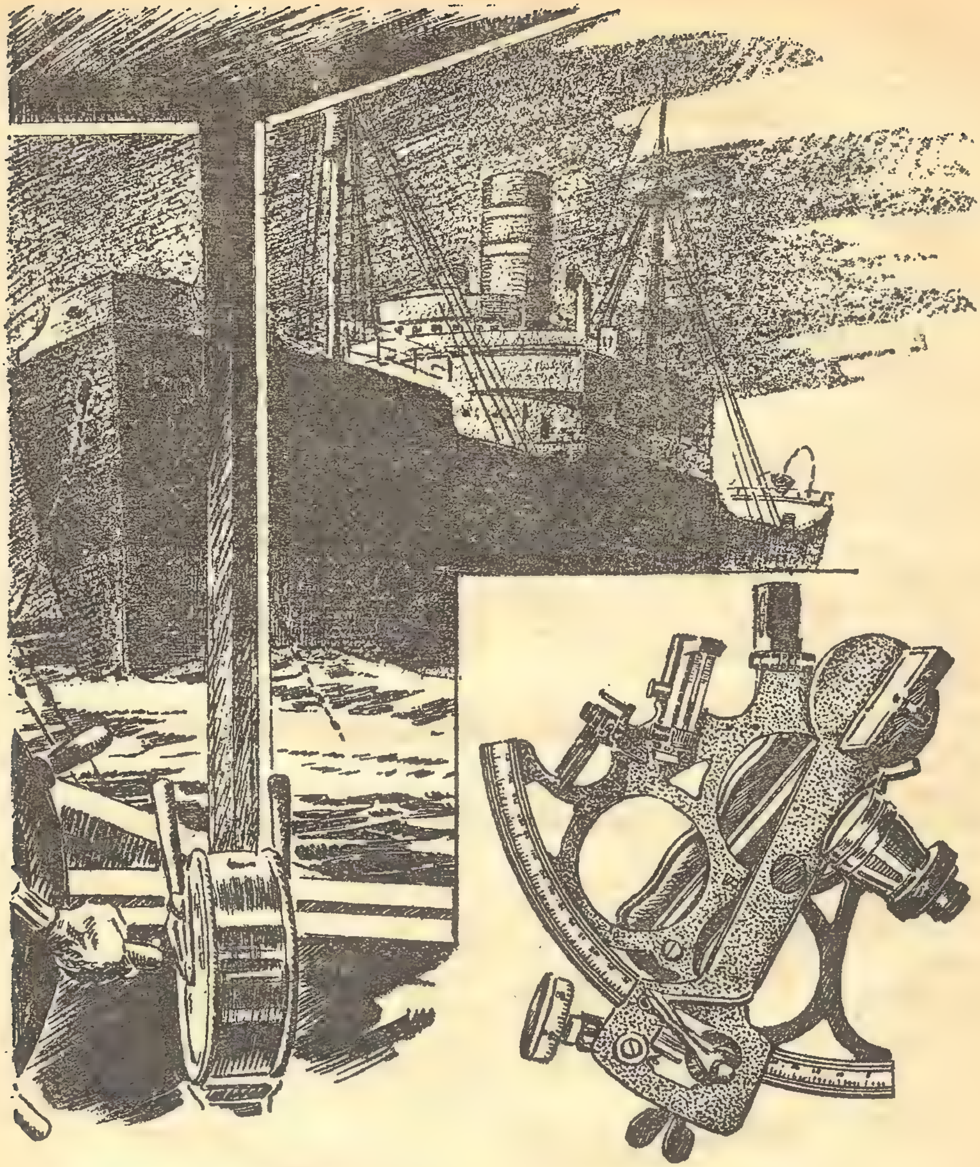


Anxious eyes searched the fog. The ship's head swung off to port. Then the dark loom of an anchored ship grew into being close on the starboard bow.

PILOT'S CHOICE

By

LESLIE C. BURBRIDGE



CAPTAIN HARRY HUGHES, master mariner and coastal pilot, paused between his third and fourth restless circuit of Dover Docks to glare balefully at the shabby office of the Reddick Maritime Agency.

"Go away and think it over for a while if you like," Reddick had said. "But you'll be back again."

The cocksureness of the shifty little agent had stuck in the pilot's gullet like frozen gall. For the hundredth time he cursed the trail of ill luck that had unshipped him from the honorable agency which normally handled coastal pilotage. It was precisely because of their high standards that he had been unable to survive his second accident.

His accident! That was something he bitterly resented. You were groping through the fog with your ship, observing all the rules and regulations and conduct-

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

ing your charge with the backing of a lifetime's experience when some crazy collier running for its tide ploughed into your engine room. Or you got put by, to send you fetching up on a nearby sandbank when a spirit tanker took a sheer at you with jammed steering gear.

True, the Commissioners had cleared him without reserve, but the Owners took a different attitude.

"A whole ship is better than a good case. You were there to foresee and avoid accidents, to get your ship safely through all these hazards . . ."

And where your employment was freelance they apparently had the right, which they exercised, to label you a Jonah and pass you over.

Then, when you were thrust from the flock, you fell prey to the vultures. Reddick's crafty little eyes had gleamed with cupidity the day Captain Hughes had walked into his dowdy little office to announce himself as a coastal pilot seeking engagements. A smart operator could always make capital out of a man shaken by his sudden descent into the company of "Brums"—the made-in-Birmingham fakes, the ersatz shellbacks with no pilotage papers.

There was nothing to require a coastal pilot being licensed. In war-time, yes; but not now. The field was open to any scrounger who could bluff his way into the game through such unscrupulous agencies as Reddick's which covered everything in the nautical calendar from honest brokering to downright roguery and crooked practice.

In Reddick's view there were no holds barred in the waterfront business, especially on such a cosmopolitan seaway as the Straits of Dover where a man would be a fool not to take his pickings from the bewildered strangers who passed that way but once.

And Captain Hughes was just discovering that Reddick did not leave everything to mere chance. He winced as he recalled the proposition that had sent him out into the clean air before he committed mayhem.

To think that the sheer perversity of fate had put him in a situation where a seedy little landlubber should propose his throwing away a ship!

* * *

IT HAD been his honest intention to reclaim his record even in such lowly tramps as fell to Reddick's agency. A year of careful work free from blemish and he would claw to windward of fate again. But he had reckoned without Reddick's cunning. Reddick had played him. Scarcely enough work to keep him going, just enough familiarity to probe his private affairs.

"You don't like tramps, do you, Captain Hughes?" he would say, and the pilot would growl that he hated their guts ever since he served his apprenticeship in them. They weren't hard case, but just plain mean. They trained men as sea navvies and ocean bums, then held them enslaved to a threadbare existence at the mercy of every slump. And in an unguarded sentimental moment he had confessed his burning ambition of reclaiming the family's high tradition of seafaring by sending his only son John to sea in a first class company. "That means a couple of years in a regular nautical academy," said the pilot, wistfully. "I don't hold with 'em, but it's the only way to get into a top-notch outfit."

"That'll take money," Reddick had remarked, and the pilot's heart had slumped with dismay as he realized his blunder.

Reddick had been working on it ever since. He'd been greasily apologetic over not putting more work in his way: he'd stretched a point giving him jobs that by rights should have gone to pilots with prior right, and so on. But if he really wanted to see the boy "done right by"—well, there was a little idea he had of something that would really pay off.

It was all the pilot could do to smother the murderous surge of anger when he eventually ripped aside the slimy curtain of hints and heard Reddick come into the open with, "Salvage is the best killing. If you were to have another 'accident' in a spot handy to an outfit I have an interest in, why, we'd all be gentlemen for life!"

The pilot had gripped the arms of his chair in a desperate battle to restrain the outburst that would certainly have clewed up his sketchy living.

"After all," Reddick had purred, eyeing the pilot's grim face calculatingly. "It wouldn't look so odd. It isn't as if you've never had an accident. The Underwriters sort of expect it from you. And you haven't much time to lose . . ."

Reddick had worked skillfully through his spiel, seeking a sly prod here, a blandishment there, a touch on a raw nerve, a thinly veiled threat, all the gamut of the tempter's technique. Hughes hardly heard it. He was thinking of John: John with his unflinching faith in his father's professional integrity: John who seemed ahead of his years in appraising accurately the wicked bias that ill luck could give a good man's record. Any day now it would be time to enter him at the Academy and embark him on his sea career. But it would take money—and that he hadn't got; and wouldn't have at this rate.

Here was money of a kind, but with it a disgrace that would probably wreck his career forever. Could John's faith stand up to that? Or would it leave its mark on the lad's life and burden him with a dread that the jinx was hereditary? "Like father like son" could have a fatal import in those circumstances. It was remarkable the way a family taint could be perpetuated by auto-suggestion. But Reddick had mentioned a sum so staggering that it almost eclipsed these fears.

"I'll go for a walk and think it over," he'd weakened enough to say. But here he was at the end of half an hour, in as bitter a dilemma as ever.

"Reddick will see you in ten minutes," said the pimply little clerk when he reentered the office. Hughes slumped himself into a hard, greasy windsor chair and stared unseeingly at the flyblown steamship placards pinned on the grimy varnished wallpaper. This was the old suspense routine. Two "Brums" came and went from the inner office, contacting their second job since he'd done his last. The crooked hands of the rackety clock marked the passage of another twenty minutes before he finally faced Reddick again.

"I still don't know . . ." he said.

Reddick mastered an annoyed frown and said, "Well, it's up to you. I haven't anything for you at the moment. The *Halliburton Valley* is due along this afternoon. She would have done you fine—if you were going to work in with me. She's the prize of the year if anything happened to her. And there's widespread fog on the forecast . . ."

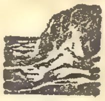
The torment in the pilot's heart showed only in the tense gripping of his powerful hands. They clutched desperately at the chair arms as sheet anchors against violence.

"You'd love to put your feet onto a good ship again, wouldn't you, Captain? But even then it's an endless grind for an old man. I've been wondering if you aren't really beyond it."

This was something the pilot couldn't stand, this foul little armchair admiral airing his opinions on nautical values. He took himself enough in hand to avoid disaster. He'd play for time. Yes, that was it. No harm in appearing to string along. He would at least get afloat again. And if he should fight through the temptation, well—he would be no worse off than he was now.

"What time's she due?"

"That's it, Captain! I thought I could count on you. Here's what you do . . ."



THE pilot only half heard the outline of the scheme. He knew every inch of the Goodwin sands; the ridges, the flats, the hard and soft areas, the local quirks of the treacherous tide. All he had to do was to put her in a position where she would be in dire danger of breaking her back at the first low water, and Reddick's outfit would "happen" to be in the near offing on some fictitious business that would ensure their being first on the scene.

He spent the remainder of the morning in moody meditation on the lofty white cliffs overlooking the Straits of Dover. The miscellaneous muddle of coastal craft in the little docks below held little interest for him, but out in the Channel, on that historic strip of waterway between England and France was the world's shipping bound to and from the farthest ends of the trade routes. Lordly liners, swift Army transports, handsome modern cargo ships, neat and speedy fruiters, valuable tankers, all manned by the cream of the merchant service, proud of their ships and companies.

And there were the inevitable dawdling tramps, manned by men with exactly the same qualifications and every bit as competent seamen, but condemned by the accident of blind circumstance to cling to their humble employment.

Come to think if it, they were probably finer all-around seamen. Take one of those lumbering old crates in light condition, no ballast, with the wheel half out of the water, and work her across the Western Ocean in the teeth of the winter gales: that was work for veterans. They probed every nook and cranny of the trading world from famous ports down to remote holes on wild coasts where the captain had to be pilot and agent, doctor and trader and stevedore all rolled into one, like in the pioneer days of sail.

On the great liners everything was laid on. Superintendents at every port, everything cut and dried and automatic with the captain a highly decorative figurehead, proud of his command, yet probably hankering secretly to escape from his floating hotel into a more virile atmosphere where a real seaman could grapple with the lusty challenge of the sea in all its primitive savagery.

His own career seemed to have gone wrong from the very beginning. Even when he had finally obtained command in a scruffy little East Coast tramp after a soul-destroying climb under hard Owners, some fool of a junior engineer lately recruited from the boilerhouse of a jam factory had seen fit to muddle his valves and flood the deep-tank with fuel oil, a deep tank cleaned out and loaded with soya beans in Vladivostok.

Damaged cargo, and out went the master. Masters were there to oversee the safety of everything on board the ship. It was the merry old practice of shooting one to encourage the others, like French generals. From then on it had been a pillar to post process until finally the war had given him a break as a coastal pilot. But there was no future in it. There was no real career at sea unless you were in a regular pilotage association or could build yourself into the fabric of a crack company.

No. If John went to sea at all it would be in a first class line where he would be spared the hard experiences of his father.

Down below in the harbor a slight movement caught his eye. It was the tiny Trinity House tender setting out for Dungeness where she would replenish the big cruising cutter with the day's quota of pilots.

Now there was a real pilot service. The mecca of all ambitious merchant seamen. A service with immaculate standards and a proud tradition reaching right back to their first royal charter in the days of King Henry the Eighth. They conducted the ships of all nations into and out of the great port of London. If John elected to crown his sea career by becoming a pilot, then there was the objective, not this wretched catch-as-catch-can business his father was clinging to so precariously.

Yet he was really of the same fraternity. All his deep experience and skill were pledged to the task of conducting vessels safely to their destination. Or were they?

He sighed heavily, and got to his feet. Time to prepare for going afloat. The ship was due at two o'clock, and by one at the latest he would have to be leaving the quay in the husky power craft that would intercept the ship four or five miles off the port to board him.

The sun beat down from a brassy sky, but on the eastern horizon a low, woolly, light gray wall was rising from the French coast. He could no longer see the cliffs of Calais, and the light easterly breeze threatened to drive the fog across the Straits before he could get shipped. He hurried his descent.

THE CAPTAIN of the *Halliburton Valley* greeted him thankfully.

"You're the best man we've seen today, Pilot! We're twenty-seven feet draught, and about nine knots. Be good to her, we've got the Berrisanio art collection in number two 'tweendecks!"

The Berrisanio art collection! No wonder Reddick had called her the prize of the year. The Press had been headlining the great exhibition for days now, and treasures from the world's museums were converging on London for the art feast of the century.

The pilot ran his eye over the tramp steamer's humble form. "How come it wasn't consigned in some crack flyer?" he asked.

"Well, we're on charter to the Royal

Express outfit," replied the captain. "It fitted in with our schedule, except that we'll have to land it at Hull. But we can get it there or anywhere else just as safely as any other ship—although it makes us all the more glad to see you, Pilot."

He settled himself to his work. Dover was still abeam when the silent gray wall slid over them, and they were in that strange dead world where only the language of foghorns spoke. On the port beam the single blast of the Admiralty pier at Dover sounded every few seconds. Ahead some five or six miles the South Goodwin lightvessel moaned twice every half minute. Once or twice he fancied he heard the East Goodwin lightvessel—it wasn't impossible with the wind easterly.

A large tanker out on the starboard bow was passing safely clear, and broad on the beam a regular and commanding blast identified the Golden Arrow cross-channel boat on its Calais to Dover run. She would have radar and was no source of anxiety. But heaven alone knew what was coming down outside the Goodwins. All the traffic from the East Coast, from the North European ports, from the Baltic and even some from the Western Ocean came down there: a most dangerous traffic lane in clear weather, let alone in fog.

"Don't take any chances with her, Pilot. Don't push on if you don't think it advisable."

Hard though he concentrated on the task of dealing with the fog, on keeping a minute to minute dead reckoning of the ship's progress and position, there was still room in his mind for Reddick's proposition. Indeed he fancied he had seen Reddick's tugs heading into the Downs before the fog shut in. Their ghoulish proximity would certainly pay off if and when their prey called for aid.

Couple of hours after high water. The tide had been running to the northeast sometime now, not the best condition for fog. You felt better stemming the tide. Any sudden warning and you could pull up so much better than with the tide under your tail.

Even as he conned through these factors he was aware that he was dodging the issue, wasting time in a delaying action against the great decision that was growing ever more urgent.

He stole covert glances at the captain. No uniform, unless you could dignify the grubby khaki dufflecoat with that title. True he sported a captain's uniform hat, but only familiarity with what should be on the peak told him that the ragged ridges so green with verdigris were the golden laurel leaves of command.

There again he was shirking an issue, wasting time and mental energy dwelling on the man's clothes when it was his face that really mattered. A strong face, with deep lines furrowing from nose to mouth; a leathery cheek, and faded blue eyes peering anxiously through a thick overgrowth of gray and ragged eyebrows.

"There stands captain, doctor, purser, father confessor, trader, judge, minister, lawyer, everything all rolled into one," reflected the pilot. "There but for fate stands me; and I must plan to strike them all down."

"Pretty thick, Pilot." The captain's tones were charged with misgiving. "This half speed still gives her about six knots. A bit too much, don't you think?"

"Perhaps you're right, Captain. Better put her down to slow."

Perhaps you're right, Captain!—already Reddick's poison seemed to be working, opening on a gambit that deferred to the captain's nervousness.

"What d'ye think, Pilot? It's pretty thick—don't you reckon we'd be wiser to get the hook down until it thins out a bit?"

"Just as you feel, Captain."

Passed to you. If he went on hefting the buck long enough the thing might solve itself.

FIVE O'CLOCK. John would be on his way home from high school now, making his usual beeline for the sea front where he would stare out at the fog and wonder how his father was making out. Anxious for him, for his professional welfare and for his safe emergence from all the hazards of that treacherous corner with its fogs, its swift tides, its heavy traffic and the menacing Goodwin sands so far off the coast. The captain's voice shook the picture from his mind.

"South Goodwin sounds pretty close, Pilot. Sounds like we ought to see it any moment!"

Was it his fancy, or was there a tinge of criticism in the captain's voice?

They were close enough to the lightvessel to get the raucous local subtones—couldn't be more than a cable or so away. In his preoccupation he had come perilously near blundering anyhow.

"Hard a-port! Give her a kick ahead! We'll get into the Downs and anchor, Captain!"

It was an automatic decision wrenched out by reflex action in the minor crisis. Even as the bow swung sluggishly to port, the great eye of the lightvessel winked twice at them redly through the fog and the diaphone blared and grunted violently like a foiled bull.

"O.K. Captain—we're all clear now. Hard a-starboard! We'll straighten up on North magnetic. There's a wreck buoy a mile north of here, then we can go nor-nor-east a mile or so and fetch up in Trinity Bay."

Something had made his heart quicken. Not the brush with the lightvessel, he was too old a hand to be affected by such incidents. It had been his mention of "Trinity Bay" and the "Fetch up"—words which Reddick had used in such a different sense and connection.

"Fetch her up on the South sand head, make out you were groping into Trinity Bay to anchor. No one will suspect." Well, Trinity Bay was only a hook in the sands miles off the coast. Easy enough to over-run your distance. Lloyd's Gazette would certainly bear that out. Even in clear weather there was always a considerable collection of coastal casualties, for it was that kind of a seaboard. But in fog the dismal list overcrowded its normal space and spilled over onto another page. Even the gentlemen in the City, who had to pay, saw little to warrant more than shrugged shoulders in another Goodwins grounding.

Some of the ships came off, some didn't. Many of them broke their backs at the first low water. The Goodwins are a graveyard thickly sown with the bones of ships which even in these days write fresh grim chapters in the long tale of maritime disaster that has continued down through the ages, ever since man first ventured on these hazardous waters.

There was not much time left to make the fatal decision, a decision which was rapidly assuming all the aspects of a hurdle into hell, for that was where his treachery promised to land him. A bare half hour aboard and the pilot had slipped into the run of the ship as if he'd been there the whole voyage. It hurt enough that the captain was every inch the competent seaman and shipmaster; and the pilot wished the captain hadn't told him so much about his home and family, for once you got tangled with the personal angle it made barratry all the harder.

And the mates. It was like a spaced peepshow of his own career, those successive steps up the toilsome ladder: third, second and then first mate. Any one of them could have been himself so many years ago. All of them were unquestioningly trusting to his professional skill and integrity.

And Reddick proposed he should sell them!

He took a hurried turn into the bridge wing to drive the vision from his inner eye.

From the wing he could see fore and aft, a panorama of the whole ship, a familiar scene. The scanty deckhouses, the bare fiddley, the thin woodbine smoke stack, the whole spare, pathetic utilitarian flavor of the workaday craft swam up for him to savor like an old warhorse. The bluff lines of the ugly hull seemed to cradle a little kingdom, bare and harsh, but still a ship. It was someone's venture, a living thing which had survived the perils of the oceans these thirty years, guarded and guided and cherished by the professional skills of seamen all over the world, men like this captain, like his officers, like the pilot himself, all bonded into a brotherhood dedicated to one end.

And some filthy little squab of longshore garbage with a soul like a rotten orange was urging him to maim her! To betray every one of the great throng of mariners and venturers whose lives were wrapped up in the ship!

But then there was John. His mind came back to the closer personal issues with a painful jerk. After all she was only an old tramp, a rusty heap of iron and wood without a soul. There were ships and men galore, too many to some cynical minds, whereas there was only one John, with only one real chance.

Stack all one's professional ethics in a heap, top them with the puddeny chunks of moral rectitude, with all the high ideals and shining ambitions, and what did they do for you, what did they amount to when set against the disillusionment of a broken career such as his? They became nothing but a pathetic huddle of faded baubles.

The pilot resumed his pacings. Well, there would be nothing committal in ordering anchoring stations.

"Stand by for'ard! Clear away the starboard anchor!"

Somewhere ahead he was either going to betray a ship or bring her safely to anchor, and he was immediately plunged into fresh visions. All the ghastly business of a salvage operation. Divers, tugs, pumps lifting craft, and the soul-baring cross-examination in the Admiralty court where the damning shame of his blunder would be cruelly exposed for all the world to see.

And yet there was the pay-off.

"BUOY on the starboard bow, sir!" The hail from the forecastle head banished his reflections. A green conical shape looking unnaturally huge so close at hand swam towards them out of the fog and slid slowly along the starboard side, the strong tide causing it to dip and sway and wag its great head like a tethered bull.

"Nor-nor-east magnetic!"

That would head her up into Trinity Bay—still time to change his mind.

A few minutes later a fresh hand came to the wheel. A young lad, obviously an apprentice. The pilot took a second glance at him. He could have been John. Not facially, but the same age, the same stocky frame, the same keen head and capable air, the same splendid officer material. He looked a trifle excited, every nerve tingling in the growing suspense like a young colt. The pilot stared at him, half hypnotized. This was one of the innocents he was to betray.

"Anchor bell right ahead, sir!" The lookout's voice was frantic.

"Hard a-port! Full ahead!"

Anxious eyes searched the fog. The ship's head swung off to port. The dark loom of an anchored ship grew into being close on the starboard bow.

"Hard a-starboard! Slow ahead!"

That would swing her stern clear. They slid past the anchored ship.

"Course again!"

The pilot wiped his brow and looked at the helmsman. Such a slip of a lad for such responsibility, yet he was handling it like a veteran. Like John would do one day.

Hell! Supposing it really was John at the wheel. Could he then deliberately ground the ship? Could he do it to any ship once John joined that great company of mariners? Wouldn't some obscure train of psychic infection taint everything he put his hand to at sea if it were born of his father's treachery?

"On her course again, sir!"

The lad at the wheel spoke with a touch of pride.

The ship drove on. Ten, twenty minutes. Gripped by a dreadful fascination the pilot sweated out his agony of indecision, watching the sands of his testing time running out almost to the last grain.

"She's not steering very well, sir!"

The lad at the wheel spoke sharply. It fell like the crack of a whip across the pilot's laboring conscience. Something seemed to explode there, and the sense of pain was purifying. He knew instantly what he must do.

"Hard a-port! Full ahead! We'll round to and stem the tide, Captain!"

It would swing her away from Trinity Bay and the encompassing sands. The touch of full speed would help her round to stem the tide and bring her still over the ground to anchor without dangerous strain on the cable.

His heart took a sudden grand surge upwards, and he breathed deeply to expand his squared shoulders. With the decision made, he felt a sudden and glorious relief. Whatever John's future, there would be nothing shameful in its foundations.

From down below in the engine-room the silence that seems part of the mystic fabric of all fogs was being broken by the measured pounding of the engines. The pilot listened intently.

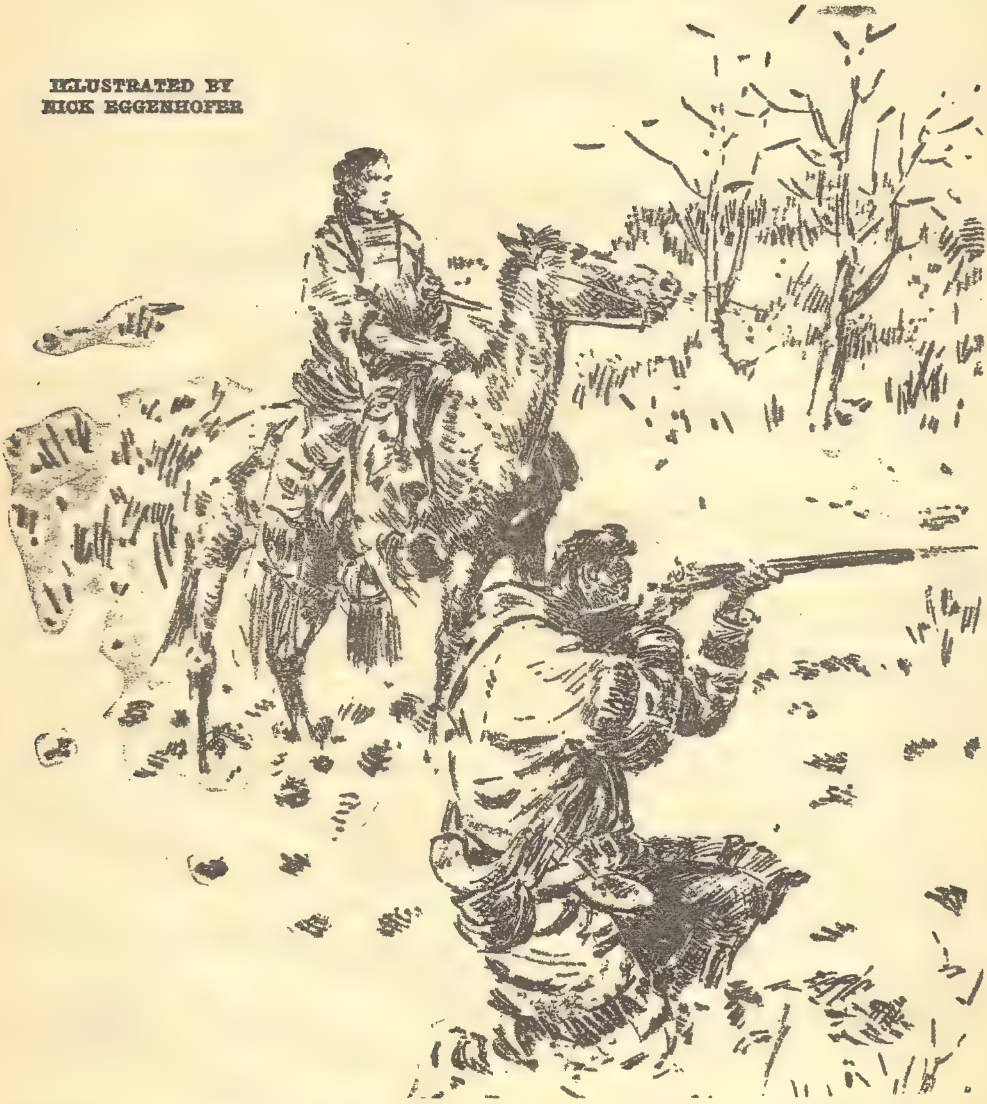
That pounding! There was something wrong about it! The healthy punchy rhythm of "I-can-do-it-again, I-can-do-it-

(Continued on page 126)

THE TRAILING OF

A FACT STORY

ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK EGGENHOFER



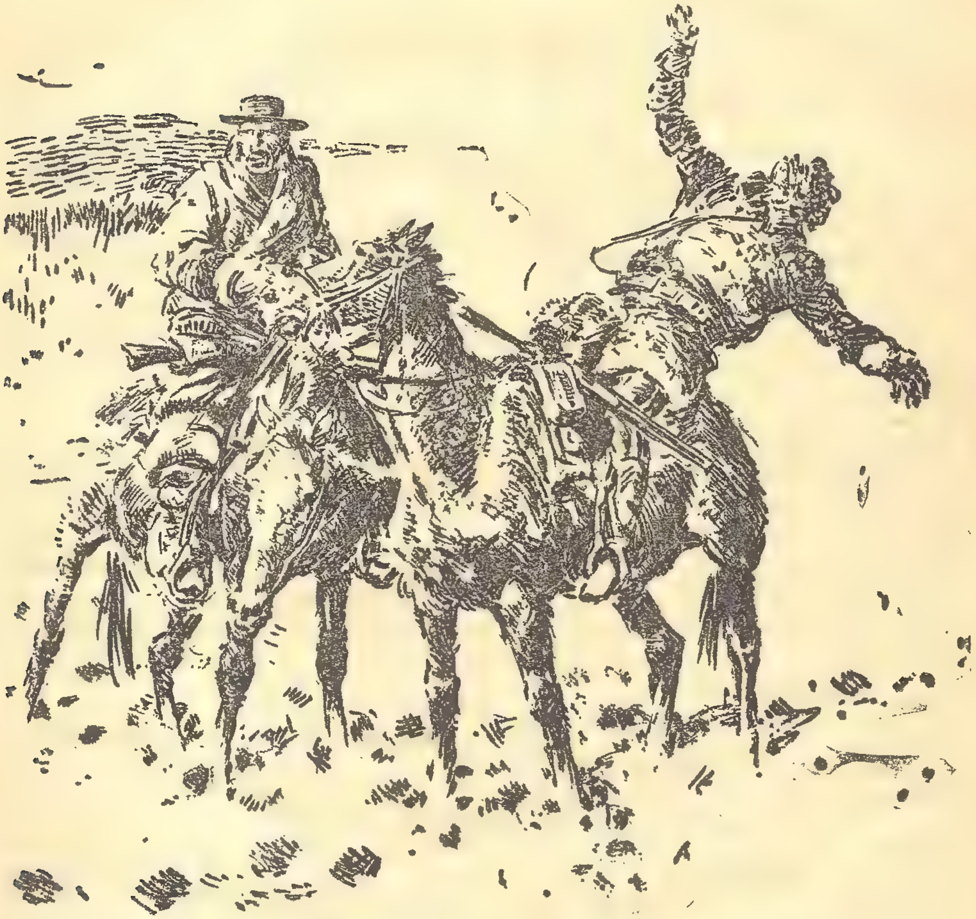
CORPORAL DICKSON of the North West Mounted Police surveyed with veiled admiration the tall, bronzed form of his prisoner, Almighty Voice.

"You would go lifting cattle, eh? You're for the woodpile out there for the next three months, boy."

A fleeting glance passed from the beady eyes of the young Cree Indian to those of Young Dust, his brother-in-law, charged jointly with robbing a settler of his steer. The door creaked open and Constable Rackham entered. With a casual glance at the iron balls clamped to the moccasined feet of the prisoners he took the

ALMIGHTY VOICE

By PHILIP H. GODSELL



Retreating before the advancing Mountie, the Indian dropped on one knee . . . Flame leapt from the gun-muzzle and Colebrook toppled to the ground.

keys from the departing Dickson, tossed them on the table, picked up a pack of greasy cards and yawned. Twice the Mountie's head dropped forward only to snap back again. From the darkening corner, twin pairs of unwinking eyes riveted upon him. Slowly his head sank forward, dropped on his outstretched arms, and his regular breathing told that he was sleeping soundly.

Cautiously a figure moved out of the shadows into the dim light of the coal-oil lamp. With serpentine-like cunning it wormed closer and closer to the sleeping guard. Coppery fingers closed upon the keys. Still Constable Rackham slept. A faint metallic click and, freed of his shackles, Almighty Voice rose to his feet, the iron ball swinging in his hand. Malevolently his snake-like eyes rested on the Mountie as he stole towards the door. With an almost imperceptible movement he disappeared into the night.

With a flying leap Almighty Voice cleared the pickets and, once safely beyond the barracks grounds, his moccasined feet carried him swiftly towards the Saskatchewan River, six miles to the northward.

No! Almighty Voice was *not* going to chop wood. He was not going to do squaw's work for any red-coated *Shimaganis.* He came of the Crees, a proud race that had carried torch and tomahawk along the frontier back in '85 and no dominating paleface was going to make him his slave.

With darkness lending a welcome cloak to his movements, he sped recklessly over the frozen ground, one thought uppermost in his mind—to put the icy waters of the turbulent Saskatchewan behind him ere the Mounties came thudding relentlessly upon his trail. Emerging upon a rutted wagon road he ran swiftly on beneath the winking stars. Ahead the land dropped away.

In the far distance he discerned, beneath the flickering light of the aurora, the shadowy north bank of the river, southern border of One Arrow's Reserve. He placed his ear to the ground. Plainly upon his eardrums was impacted the tattoo of thudding hoofbeats. The *Shimaganisuk*—the Long Knives, as they called the Mounties—were close upon his trail. At last he stood beside the inky flood of the Saskatchewan, dotted with ghostly pans of floating ice, and dived into the frigid waters.

OF ALL his coppery charges on the One Arrow reservation, Almighty Voice, the sprightly son of Sounding Sky, had given Louis Marion, the Indian Agent, more trouble than any of the others.

Tall and good-looking, with burning black eyes, Almighty Voice not only had a way with the ladies but had given early evidence of an uncontrolled temper and unwillingness to brook restraint. When the agent had taken his Indians to the hay camp Almighty Voice had defied him and gone off hunting. Then he'd proceeded to upset the entire life of the reserve with his marital irregularities and his fondness for the wives of other men. At sixteen he'd abducted the thirteen-year-old daughter of Napanise, lived with her a year and kicked her out in favor of the bright-eyed daughter of old Kapahoo, paying for the girl with a steer he'd obviously stolen. Ere spring breezes had softened the prairie snows his heart had cooled towards his latest partner and she, too, had been abruptly cast aside—this time for the comely daughter of Ochisk, the Rump.

"Kisse-Manitou-Wayo," Louis Marion had warned him, "you must abide by the white man's law. From now on you'll keep only *one* wife. Any more running after women and I'll send the Red Coats after you."

Instead of being impressed, young Voice had merely taunted him—then, with contemptuous disregard of the agent's warning, he'd cast off his latest wife and taken up with the daughter of Old Dust from Fort A la Corne. The wedding feast was still in progress when a nearby settler angrily complained of the disappearance of still another steer. A disgruntled ex-brother-in-law of Voice's whispered in Marion's ear that Almighty Voice was the culprit.

Late that day Louis Marion entered the white-painted Mounted Police barracks at Duck Lake. "Charlie," he complained to Sergeant Colebrook, "an Indian has identified the steer Voice gave to his latest spark as the one stolen from Jimmy Cummings.. You'd better pick him up while I'm making treaty payments at the reserve on the twenty-second."

As Almighty Voice extended a sinewy hand across the table to grasp his treaty money two days later a shining pair of handcuffs snapped suddenly about his wrists. Turning, his smoldering eyes flashed into those of Sergeant Colebrook. A moment later and young Dust, his hands manacled, had joined him and the police democrat rolled off across the prairie.

Thus the cattle-stealing couple had found themselves thrust unceremoniously into the one-roomed cell at Duck Lake.

DAWN was breaking over the conical lodges of One Arrow's reservation. In the tepee of old Sounding Sky, Spotted Calf, the mother of Almighty Voice, was patching a pair of moccasins. Behind her were piled bags of pemmican, buffalo robes and blankets. Suddenly she stiffened as the tattoo of pounding hoofs smote her ears. A moment later there sprang into the lodge the red-coated forms of Sergeant Colebrook and Corporal Dickson.

"Have you seen Almighty Voice?" the sergeant demanded sharply.

"Nemoona!" came the guttural denial.

For a second the eyes of the Mountie swept the interior of the tepee then, lulled by the nonchalant attitude of the squaw, they hurried back outside and mounted. While the hoofbeats were still echoing across the prairie the steel muzzle of a rifle emerged from between two sacks of pemmican, followed by the bronzed face, parrot-like nose and smoldering eyes of Almighty Voice. "Those *Shimaganisuk* were lucky," he grunted. "If they'd come near those bags I'd have shot them both like dogs."

For the next four days Colebrook, Dickson, and Dumont—the half-breed police scout—searched the village and the surrounding bluffs and coulees in vain. Stony stares met them at every turn. Still they were convinced that Almighty Voice wasn't far away. Colebrook turned at last to Dumont.

"I *know* that son-of-Satan's around here somewhere," he growled, "and these *Nitchies* are keeping him posted. Perhaps if I pull out you might discover something. I've an idea he's going to head for Old Dust's camp at Fort A la Corne."

Back at the barracks Sergeant Colebrook loosened the collar of his tunic and turned to his wife. "There'll be nothing doing till morning . . ." Suddenly he leapt to his feet. From without came the sound of pounding hoofs. A moment later the door opened and the snow-covered form of Dumont entered. The half-breed seemed excited.

"Voice left for Fort A la Corne this morning along with Old Dust's girl," he said. "He's only got one hoss an' it's right off the grass so he'll travel pretty slowly. If we pull out now we'll overhaul him. This snow'll make good trailin'."

Already the sergeant was buttoning his short buffalo coat. With a quick farewell to his wife he joined the scout outside.

Dawn found them driving the team and buckboard with one led horse along the rutted snow-covered trail that wound between poplar groves towards Fort A la Corne some fifty miles away. The sky, gray with scudding clouds, gave promise of more snow.

"Look!" Dumont pointed to the tracks of an un-shod horse and moccasined feet in the snow. "Voice's tracks. The girl's ridin' the cayuse."

The tangled trail and wet snow made heavy going, for the fugitives had deliberately picked their way through the thickest growths of timber they could find. "P'sst!" warned Dumont, pulling suddenly at the reins. From ahead came the sharp snap of a breaking twig. The frosted willows parted and into the snow-covered meadow rode a mounted man in black felt hat and fringed buckskin. Recognition was mutual. It was Joseph MacKay, police scout from Prince Alberta.

"Good!" exclaimed Colebrook. "Here, Joe, take this buckboard back to Duck Lake and let's have your cayuse. Voice's been keeping to the bush and we're losing time by driving."

Soon the dimming light forced them to camp in a grove of poplars, kindle a fire and spread their bedrolls for the night. Dawn saw them on the trail again.

They had ridden but a short distance when they were startled by the whip-like report of a muzzle-loader. "Almighty Voice!" Speaking with a single voice they spurred their horses forward and swung into a whitened meadow. Seated upon a pony was the bright-eyed daughter of Old Dust. Beyond, Almighty Voice was desperately ramming a new charge down the barrel of his muzzle-loader, a prairie chicken at his feet.

Already the sergeant was moving toward the retreating Indian, urging him to surrender.

"Don't go close—he'll kill you!" came Dumont's frightened whisper.

There came an ominous click as the Indian drew back the gun-hammer. Dropping on one knee, Voice took deliberate aim, his black eye gleaming with murderous hate along the barrel. *"Awoostay, Shimaganis.* Keep back, Long Knife, or I'll kill you!"

With cool deliberation the sergeant moved forward, still urging the Indian to surrender. Dumont's face was gray. The girl on the horse was sobbing. "For God's sake," came the terrified warning of the guide, "come back man. He'll kill you!"

Retreating before the advancing Mountie, the Indian dropped on his knee again. Once more the gun was leveled with murderous deliberation. *"Awoostay, Shimaganis!"* His lips set grimly. *"Kawina!"* came the sobbing cry of the girl. There was a booming reverberation. Yellow flame leapt viciously from the muzzle of the gun.

Colebrook straightened in the saddle and toppled to the ground, his life blood crimsoning the snow. With a cry of horror, Dumont swung his horse around and spurred back through the woods as Almighty Voice, gun still smoking, leapt into the bluff and disappeared.

ACROSS the white immensity of the prairies news of the killing spread like wildfire. Banner headlines in every newspaper of the West told of the killing of the popular Mountie and demanded prompt apprehension of the killer. A week later a bright-eyed Indian girl rode from the snow-filled woods into the trading post of Fort A la Corne. Out of the shadows loomed a buffalo-coated figure. A gauntleted hand closed upon her shoulder. Thrown into a light sleigh, she was hurried swiftly to Prince Albert and subjected to close questioning. But, despite all grilling, the latest of Almighty Voice's conquests would tell the Mounties nothing.

Rumor followed hard upon the heels of rumor. Voice had been killed in a quarrel across the border! He was hunting with the Stoney Indians in the Rockies! Like a will-o'-the-wisp, he was reported here, there and everywhere.

Disguised as trappers and traders, halfbreed police scouts in black felt hats, buckskin coats and moccasins combed the reservations, mingled with the men of a dozen tribes, and lent an attentive ear to lodge-fire gossip. Each new rumor sent buffalo-coated men riding on horseback, or crunching through snow-filled forests on babiche-netted snowshoes—sleeping out in snowdrifts at fifty and sixty below zero—searching for Colebrook's killer.

Shaken to its very depths by the storm of criticism sweeping the country, the Force was aroused to unswerving efforts to trace the ubiquitous Almighty Voice. But to locate a solitary, trained athlete in an area of some six hundred thousand square miles was very much like looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack. Though patrols scoured woods and prairies and Indian reservations the outlaw continued to evade them.

A year slipped by and still no word of the elusive Almighty Voice. Nineteen months after the shooting of Sergeant Colebrook, Corporal Bowdridge, at Batoche detachment ten miles east of Duck Lake, observed a mud-bespattered horseman riding towards the barracks. As the slouch-hatted figure drew closer he recognized Napoleon Venne, son of a halfbreed rancher who lived ten miles east of One Arrow's reserve.

"I'm roun' up de hosses yes'day along wid my brudder David," he explained. "I'm see de cattle mill aroun' like hell t'ree, four mile 'way. *'Sacre!'* I'm tell David, 'someone he's chase de hell out of dem damn cattle.' So we ride towards de bluff. Dere's t'ree Injuns ridin' de hell out o' a bunch o' steers for try to steal dem. We shout an' chase dem till one hoss step in a badger hole an' t'row de rider. It's Little Saulteaux, de cousin o' Almighty Voice." He wiped the sweat from his bronzed forehead with the fringed sleeve of his buckskin coat. "We ask him de names of de odders dat got 'way. One, he says, is Young Dust, Almighty Voice's brudder-in-law. But he's too all-fire scare to tell de names ob de odder. Guess, Corporal, you can figger it out for you'self."

Bowdridge had already guessed. With a few quick strides he entered the log telegraph office and sent an urgent message to Inspector Wilson at Duck Lake that Almighty Voice was in the vicinity, armed and desperate, and evidently bent on making trouble.

"Come on," he turned to Napoleon.

"Pick a horse from the corral there and we'll ride over to Lizard Creek. Chances are Voice'll be hanging around his father's tepee."

A few hours' ride brought them into sight of the painted tepees of the tribe limned like the indented teeth of a saw against the bright green foliage, the very picture of peaceful calm. They reached the tepee of old Sounding Sky unannounced, dismounted and dived within. His mahogany features convulsed with savage anger, Sounding Sky greeted them with a tirade of vitriolic Cree.

"Where's your son—Almighty Voice?" demanded Bowdridge.

"Find him," snarled the Indian. *"Look* for him if you want him but, take care, *Atimo Shimaganis,* that no bullet bores a hole in that red coat of yours." Savagely he turned on Venne. "Dog of a half-breed!" he spat viciously. "Leave this red-coat or something *bad* will happen to you."

Bowdridge flung aside the door-flap and leapt into the saddle. Galloping to the village they commenced to search the tepees. Surrounded by a sea of hawk-like faces, and eyes glinting with hate, they went through one lodge after another, the very truculence of the Indians denoting that the trail was hot. A band of mounted bucks were noisily driving a pony herd towards them but, beyond it, Bowdridge had already detected a swift and furtive movement of two figures speeding towards the bluff.

"Venne!" He vaulted into the saddle. "Two Indians just dived into that willow patch between those two bluffs yonder. I'll take the right one—you take the left."

The Mountie had almost reached the right bluff when the ominous sound of a gun-shot echoed across the prairie. From Venne came an agonized cry as his horse wheeled and almost threw him. In quick succession came another shot, followed by the impact of a bullet and Venne's gun flew into the air. A moment later and Venne had disappeared in the long grass to turn up at the lodges, his face gray and drawn with pain—his shoulder shattered by a bullet.

With the entire camp tense with excitement and Almighty Voice hidden somewhere among the poplars, a lull settled over the afternoon calm of the prairies. But, it was the ominous calm of watchful waiting. Only a spark was now needed to explode the powder-keg of pent-up feeling.

The scarlet after-glow of sunset still lingered over the purple-shadowed Minichinas Hills when a buckboard pulled up before the Duck Lake barracks. Throwing open the door, Inspector Wilson observed two figures supporting a wounded man. In the yellow glow of the lamplight he recognized Dr. Stewart and the elder Venne, then the drawn face of Napoleon. In quick, curt words Venne told his story. Almighty Voice had struck again. The Indians, hundreds of them, were striking their tepees and moving off to the reserve, sullen and angry. Sounding Sky, by way of defiance, was remaining right at Lizard Creek.

"So! the old rascal threatened you, eh!" The inspector turned to his three constables. "We'll soon take care of that. Be ready, boys, to leave at daylight. I'll wire Inspector Allen at Prince Albert."

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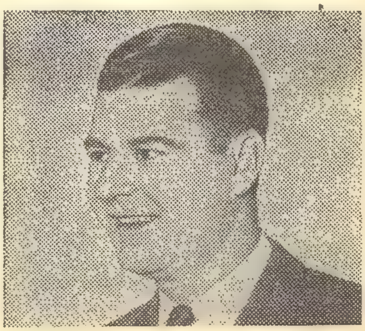


"THAT Indian's got the edge on us," Allen admitted to Sergeant Raven as he read Wilson's wire. "Our only chance is to take along enough men to flush him from hiding and surround him."

At dawn Allen and Raven headed for the Lizard Hills with eleven scarlet-coated riders. At eight o'clock they topped a willow-crested ridge and gazed at the soft panorama of undulating hills, and the green valley below them dotted here and there with grassy knolls, thicketed hollows and island-like copses of birch and poplar. Suddenly Allen leaned across the saddle-bow and pointed. A mile ahead two dark objects had broken cover and were moving swiftly across the floor of the valley. "Say, Raven," he asked, "are those Indians or deer?" As he spoke they were swallowed up in a cucumber-shaped bluff below. "Keep behind," he ordered. "I'll ride ahead and take a look."

Sweeping swiftly down the gentle slope Raven and Allen disappeared within the stand of shimmering poplars. Suddenly Allen's horse threw back its ears and snorted. A shadowy movement caught the inspector's eye. There came a thunderous report, a flash of orange flame, and he pitched to the ground, his arm shattered by a bullet. As Raven returned the fire there was a smothered cry, then silence. Crawling painfully through the matted willows Allen was confronted by the menacing muzzle of a rifle. "Throw me your cartridges or I'll blow your brains out!" came a guttural threat in Cree.

In a flash the officer realized that the Indians must be short of ammunition, and that his belt alone could replenish their supply. His mouth set grimly as the beady eye of Almighty Voice regarded him malevolently along the shining barrel. In jarring gutturals the warning was repeated. Determined not to surrender his belt at any cost, Allen continued to look death in the face. Behind him sounded a crashing of undergrowth and three red-coated constables caught him and dragged him into the open. Up the slope they helped him under a hail of leaden bullets. Uttering a groan, Raven slumped from his horse. At last the two men, both severely wounded, were helped to safety.

Night was creeping over the valley when, to the jingling of accoutrements, an armed posse from Duck Lake rode grimly into the circle of firelight. Headed by Dr. Stewart, it consisted of Ernest Grundy, Pozer, Davidson, Bell and Cook.

"Guess we'd better rush the bluff," suggested Corporal Hockin, realizing that, even with the additional forces, there would not be sufficient men to throw a cordon around the hiding place of the fugitives and keep them from escaping in the dark.

"Ready!" shouted Hockin, his foot in the stirrup. Pozer, Grundy, Cook, Davidson and two constables slung their guns across the pommels of their saddles. "Charge!"

Thundering down the shadowed slope they charged directly at the west end of the bluff, their rifles spitting flame. Into the bluff, and through the matted undergrowth, they urged their mounts. Not a shot was fired. All was silent as the grave. With the others behind him, Hockin wheeled his horse and charged back through the poplars. Crack! A yellow spear of flame flashed in their faces. Acrid gun-smoke stung their nostrils. Horses reared and snorted. With a strangled cry Constable Kerr pitched forward—dead. Again the willows belched fire. A choked groan and Grundy pitched sideways from his rearing horse. A third burst of flame and Hockin clutched at his stomach and slid inertly to the ground. Leaping forward, Hume caught him and, through a barrage of lead, supported the dying man to the bluff's edge.

Amazed by the sudden tragedy, Marion sent his team careening down the slope amidst a hail of flying lead and yanked them to their haunches beside the dying Hockin. While Davidson held Hockin's head, and Hume covered the retreat with belching revolver, they drove slowly up the slope. Bullets whined about them. One splintered a spoke. Another struck Davidson in the heel. Miraculously, they reached the ridge without further casualties, to find Inspector Wilson awaiting them.

Hockin died at sundown, throwing a pall of gloom upon the men gathered around a huge campfire kindled back of the ridge.

Almighty Voice had taken toll of four

lives now; two of their most popular officers lay dangerously wounded at Prince Albert, while Davidson and Napoleon had been struck by the outlaw's bullets. Never, in the entire course of its history, had the Force suffered such abject humiliation. And still the murdering Voice was as firmly ensconced as ever. From the purple-shadowed bluff came constant reminders in the defiant cries of the Indians, the whip-like reports of their guns, and the sinister song of their bullets. Then, to climax the eerie vigil, there echoed through the starlit night the weird ululations of Almighty Voice's war song.

COMMISSIONER Herchemer fumed as one report succeeded another—each more disastrous than the last. As the mounting lists of dead and wounded came rolling in he sent a sharp command over the wire. Under no consideration must any more risks be taken.

Late the following afternoon the cordon on the ridge received a further addition to its numbers. Superintendent Gagnon rode up with more police, a seven-pounder, and a posse of fifteen civilians from Prince Albert. As the violet shades of night stole over the valley, more hoofbeats announced the arrival of Assistant-Commissioner McIlree with a nine-pounder cannon, and twenty-five more constables sent post-haste from Regina by Commissioner Herchemer.

Ringing the dark bluff that still hid the defiant Almighty Voice were now assembled a hundred men and two iron-throated cannon. Old-timers squirmed at the very thought. The hours of darkness were fraught with tense excitement. Silhouetted against the star-spangled sky, across the black maw of the valley, appeared a number of ebony figures. Suddenly the silence of the summer night was rent by a dirge-like wail that rose and fell in weird cadence. Spotted Calf, the mother, was singing the Death Song for her war-like son—urging him to meet death bravely.

Once, for a fleeting second, a shadowy figure appeared at the edge of the bluff and the cry of Almighty Voice echoed across the valley. "Brothers—we have fought a good fight. Send me food. I am starving. Tomorrow we will fight again."

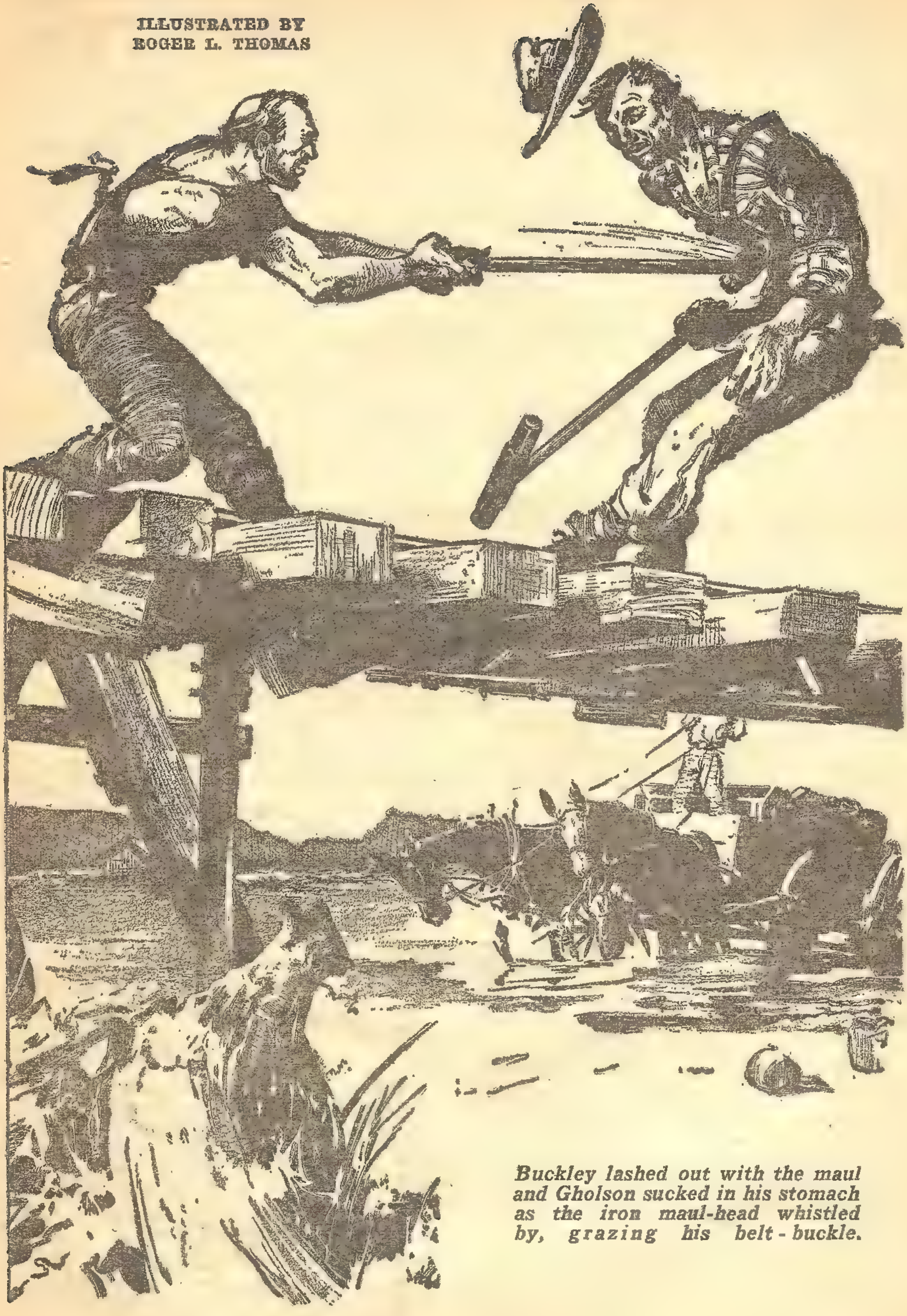
As the prairie dawn broke in rosy streamers over the virgin loveliness of the Saskatchewan valley all was peace and tranquil quiet. Suddenly the Sabbath stillness was broken by the brazen-throated roar of the nine-pounder and the shrill scream of shrapnel. Like a puny firecracker came the answering crack of a rifle. Again there echoed across the valley the agonized wail of Almighty Voice's mother. At seven o'clock the firing ceased. At nine-thirty it recommenced and continued for an hour. No longer was there any reply from the hidden guns in the bluff.

With Mounted Police and posses behind him, McIlree prepared for another assault on the death-dealing copse. With barking guns the cavalcade thundered down the slope and into the heart of the thicket, which had been torn and lacerated with fragments of bursting shells.

Suddenly McIlree pulled rein. At his horse's feet gaped the rifle pit. In the bottom lay the torn body of Almighty Voice. Across him sprawled the twisted form of his cousin, Little Saulteaux. From the bush ahead came a surprised cry. Attired in red tunic and breeches, stripped from the naked body of Constable Kerr, was the corpse of a third Indian—Almighty Voice's brother-in-law, Young Dust, who'd evidently sneaked into the pit to help him and thought better of it. Caught in an attempt to desert in the garb of a Mountie, he'd been shot in the forehead by Almighty Voice.

All around the poplars had been stripped, mute evidence of the suffering of the trio in the gun-pit and of their attempt to allay the pangs of thirst and hunger by chewing on the bark. A hundred yards from the bluff, McIlree came across a crude crutch and a trail of broken glass. On that first night Almighty Voice had attempted to escape but had been driven back by the vigilance of the Mounties and the wound in his ankle from the bullet of Raven's revolver. But, in passing, Almighty Voice had made a last defiant gesture to the red-coats. Scrawled with the point of his hunting knife on the bark of a poplar tree in the queer syllabics of the Crees was his defiance and his epitaph: *HERE DIED THREE BRAVE MEN.*

ILLUSTRATED BY
ROGER L. THOMAS



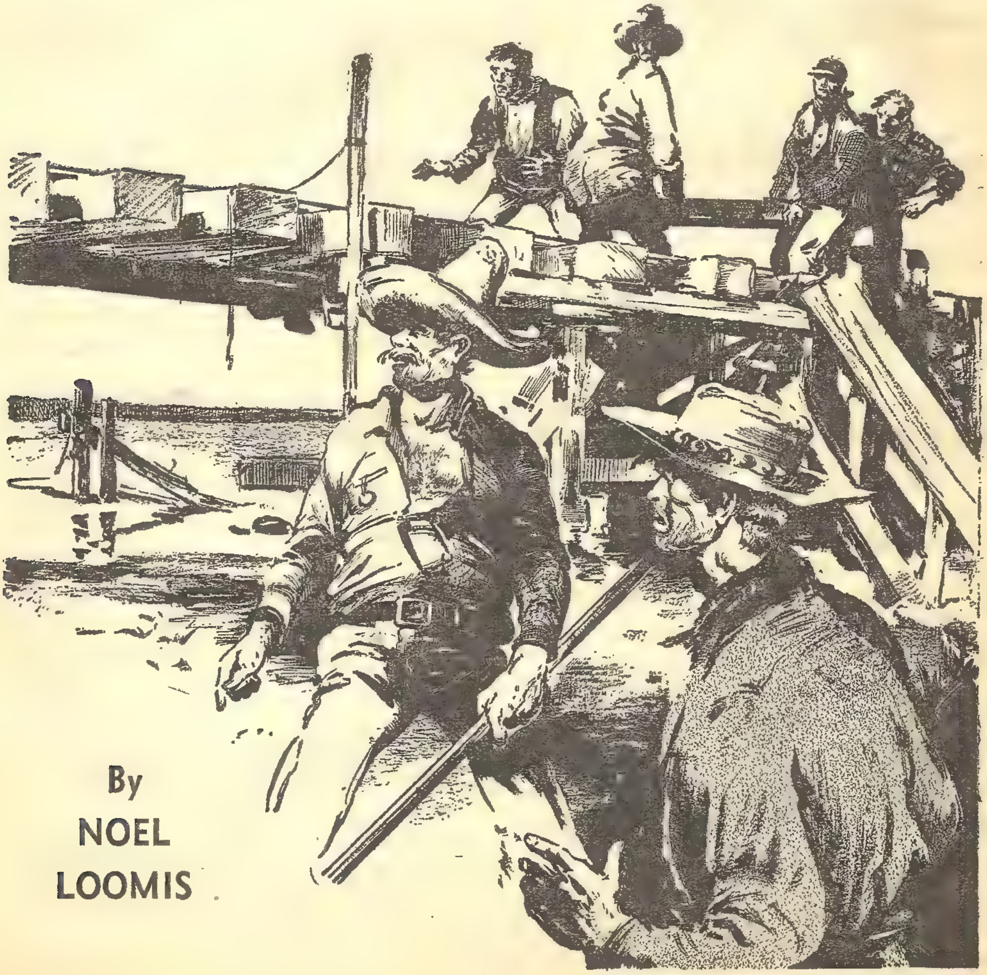
Buckley lashed out with the maul and Gholson sucked in his stomach as the iron maul-head whistled by, grazing his belt-buckle.

TOUGH HOMBRE

WHEN Big Blue Buckley was pushing steel through the mountains of Colorado Territory in the seventies, he had only one policy: "It takes guts to build a railroad." So when they wanted a man to lay track through Sonora in the Republic of Mexico in 1880, they said, "It takes Buckley to build a railroad."

They found him in a high mountain pass, driving spikes with his crew in ten-below-zero weather against a forty-mile blizzard from the northwest. They got him into his foreman's shack over a pot of hot coffee and told him, "If we can get three hundred miles of track from Guaymas, Mexico, to Nogales, Arizona, by the end of 1882, Porfirio Diaz will give us ten thousand dollars a mile. It's wild country and maybe materials will be scarce. Think you can do it?"

Buckley looked through the tiny window at the snow streaming by outside. He could see a flat-car loaded with rails sitting on the length of track he had just spiked. The snow was filling up the spaces among the loaded rails. He turned back to the officials. His pale blue eyes lighted



By NOEL LOOMIS

up with the only kind of exultation he ever showed.

"I can build a railroad anywhere," he said. "With anything."

So they sent him down to Guaymas on the Golfo de Cortéz, with the pick of his Kansas-toughened crews, to build a grade and spike rails through a desert infested with cactus, rattlesnakes, outlaws, and buzzards.

Big Blue didn't hesitate. Maybe he didn't know Sonora was outside of the United States. Maybe he didn't care.

He started asking for more help while the engineers were still hammering down a wharf on Ardilla Island out in the bay, and even before they started throwing a trestlework across a thousand feet of shallow water to the mainland.

Help was slow in coming. They told Buckley it was hard to get reliable men to go to Mexico. Buckley sent back a characteristic answer: "I didn't ask for reliable men. Just get me somebody who can handle a span of mules or is willing to learn. Get 'em out of the penitentiaries—anywhere. But get 'em fast."

He was already running grade toward Hermosillo, but it was too slow to suit him. He had a hundred Yaqui Indians on the picks and shovels, but the Yaquis were cousins of the Apaches; they were fighters by heritage and not laborers, and Big Blue found out he couldn't push them. When he bellowed at them, they stared back inscrutably and went on taking their time. Then one blistering hot day in October a windjammer sailed up the Gulf from a three-month journey around the Horn, and half a hundred men disembarked.

BIG BLUE was waiting for them at the railroad camp north of Guaymas. He was standing on top of the fresh grade. He was built like the trunk of an oak and his skin had the look of well-tanned leather. His eyes took in the men getting out of the wagons, and began to narrow. He strode back to meet them.

The first man was six-feet-one and lean but not thin; his sloping shoulders indicated strength. His dark face, much too sharply lined for a young man, indicated something Buckley didn't like.

"What's your name?" asked Buckley, stopping.

"Wade Gholson," said the tall man belligerently.

"Where you from?" Buckley seemed to be probing.

"East."

Buckley gave no sign. He looked over the others. "Are you all together?"

"All together," said Gholson. "All that's left of us. One man got his throat cut when we were off Brazil. Another fell overboard off Lima. There's only forty-five left." His black eyes watched Buckley.

Buckley ploughed down the loose side of the grade and stopped in front of Gholson. "Are you looking for work or for trouble?"

By that time the forty-four other newcomers were ranged alongside Gholson and back of him, but Buckley did not appear to notice. The Mexican Yaquis on the other side of the grade stopped work to watch.

Gholson said insolently, "I'm not afraid of trouble. I killed a man up in Maine with a spike-maul. That's one reason I left the States."

"What's the other reason?" asked Buckley.

Gholson's eyes became sharp like knifepoints. "The other reason," he said, "is about my brother."

Buckley's pale eyes were boring into the man. "Who's your brother?"

"My brother was Vince Gholson," he said slowly. "You killed him with a spike-maul up in Indian Territory a couple of years back."

The hot desert air whistled in through Buckley's nostrils, and his chest swelled. He nodded as if to himself. "He looked like you," he said. "I knew there was something—" He recovered his alertness and looked at the men back of Gholson, at the men alongside. "You've had three months to tell these fellows all about it, haven't you?"

"I told them," said Gholson flatly. "And they're with me."

Buckley seemed to make up his mind suddenly. His face swelled and a blue tint swept over his mahogany skin as he moved.

Gholson must have known what was

coming, but he didn't do something about it fast enough. Buckley's big fist flashed, and Gholson's head shot back with a crack of neck-bones. He stumbled and fell. He got to his feet, swinging. Buckley went after him into the middle of the crowd. He hit Gholson again and Gholson fell again.

Gholson got up swaying, with murder in his eyes. He came forward drawing a knife.

Buckley's big fists exploded like dynamite on his jaw. Gholson went down. Then Big Blue jerked him to his feet by the collar of his lumberjack shirt. Buckley's fury was gone. "All I'm interested in," he said, "is can you skin a span of mules? Draw yourself a team of jugheads and see if this hundred-and-ten-degree sun will boil some of the trouble out of you."

Buckley didn't even take the man's knife. He spun him around and shoved him hard. Gholson's feet got tangled and he went down on his face in the alkali dirt. Buckley turned to the others. "There's work to do," he said. He waved a big arm and they scattered. Gholson was getting up. Buckley's back was toward him. Buckley climbed the grade and walked away.

He met a pair of mules pulling a dump-bucket and driven by a tough little Irishman wearing black work clothes that were grimed with white sweat-salt. The Irishman said out of the corner of his mouth, "You should of hit him harder. You only made him mad."

Big Blue Buckley snorted. "He can't drive mules if he's layin' up somewhere with a broken neck."

O'Connell muttered, "I've seen some tough gangs on the U. P., but this bunch off the boat is the cut-throatingest bunch I ever laid eyes on. They must have scoured all the toughest dives in China for 'em."

Buckley grinned at him. "Every last one of them is running from the law," he said. "You can see it in their faces. They took jobs to get out of the country. They figure they'll raise a lot of hell and I'll fire them, then nobody will go looking for them. But they're going to get a surprise," he said pleasantly. "They're going to learn how to build railroads . . ."

FIVE HUNDED graders were working toward Hermosillo, ninety miles north of Guaymas. They grubbed out mesquite roots, they filled in cuts, scraped down rises, laid culverts, built up the grade and topped it with rock ballast.

The route was mostly over desert, but behind them, back toward Guaymas, the powder-men were blasting a cut through the foothills of the western range of the Sierra Madres, and ahead of them, near Hermosillo, the engineers and steel-men were throwing a bridge over the Rio Sonora.

That first afternoon Wade Gholson sullenly followed a drag-bucket behind a span of big Missouri mules. He had the reins over his shoulder. He tipped the bucket to scoop up a load of frosty-looking alkali dirt. He cracked his whip over the mules' backs, and followed them at a half-run as the bucket slid free. His feet sank ankle-deep in the loose dirt, and curtains of dust hung in the heat of the sun.

His mules came to the fill. He heaved on the big handle with both hands to dump the load. But he didn't turn loose fast enough. He was thrown over the bucket onto the heels of the mules. He was kicked in the ribs but he rolled out of the way of the overturned bucket. When he got to his feet he glared maliciously at Buckley. He still had the whip in one hand, and he fingered it.

Buckley's eyes stayed flat and deadly. He knew what Gholson was thinking. The man wanted to wrap that blacksnake around his neck. But Buckley wasn't ready for a showdown. He had nipped off the first show of trouble; now he would let it grow a little under Gholson's leadership. Gholson had made an indirect threat about a spike-maul. Presently Buckley would give him a chance to prove up on it . . .

The next three weeks went fast. Two hundred Mexicans, brown-skinned under big straw hats, worked leisurely but ceaselessly with pick and shovel to level an alkali hill, while the drivers dragged the loosened dirt away and filled it into a gully. Sun-parched men cursed the mules, lashed them with blacksnakes, tied red-figured handkerchiefs over their own noses, and followed the dump-buckets, while other crews beyond the gully were scraping and grading, and loggers were up in the hills cutting ties from the hard, dense wood of the fustic-tree.

Buckley strode up and down the grade, goading the Mexicans, swearing at the graders. His big body could be seen somewhere on the grade at any hour of the day.

In those three weeks he did not fight. Gholson and his crowd hung together. They became more sullen, more uncooperative, but they avoided a break with him. That suited Buckley; he would give them an excuse to fight soon enough. One of them was killed by another over a card game in the middle of the night, but Buckley did not interfere, though O'Connell and the other veterans of the Union Pacific track crews looked at him questioningly.

"As long as they kill their own crowd," said Buckley indifferently, "it's none of my business."

Buckley seemed intent on one thing only: to push the grade to the Sonora River by the time the bridge-gang got through there. It was almost as though the grade were a physical extension of himself, and he would will it to be extended a certain number of miles every day.

He knew that Gholson would try to kill him. He could see it in the man's rebellious eyes, in the set of his jaw. He sensed it in the attitude of the forty or more men around the coffee-pot fire the night they were waiting for the supper call and he strode into the middle of the group and said, "Work tonight."

Nobody answered. Buckley looked at Gholson. Gholson took a deep breath, but he didn't get up; he leaned down and began to untie the rawhide laces of his shoe.

"From now on," said Buckley, "there'll be plenty of night work. That's why you're getting two and a quarter a day."

From the corner of his eye he saw Gholson hold up his shoe and drain the sand out of it. He left. Up at the cook-wagon, O'Connell was leaving with a plate of antelope steak and biscuits and a big tin cup of coffee. He said to Buckley, "Is that bunch going to work with us tonight?"

Buckley glared at him. "If I hadn't known you since 1867," he said, "I'd knock you over the cook-wagon."

But it was a real shock to him when O'Connell said, "You'd better save your strength."

O'Connell went on, found his spot in the sand, crossed his feet, and dropped back, holding his food far out to balance. Buckley took a big breath. So the Irish terriers were getting restless for a showdown. It had better come soon, then.

It came the next day. A message arrived from the engineer at Guaymas. Buckley read it and smiled with satisfaction. And that night he chose a moment when Gholson was at the cookwagon getting his grub. Buckley stood with his back to the wagon, legs apart like leaning tree-trunks, and bellowed, "I want eight spikers for tomorrow morning. We start laying track at Guaymas." He half turned. "O'Connell, you drove spikes on the K. P."

O'Connell, his mouth full, nodded. Buckley looked at Gholson. "I heard you can handle a spike-maul," Buckley said.

He saw the light rise in the man's dark eyes, and he knew that was what Gholson had been waiting for. Gholson nodded. "I'll drive with you," he said pointedly.

Buckley passed on. He asked for more, and counted off seven spikers and four helpers. Then he looked at Gholson and grinned, his sun-whitened lips forming a square. "I'll take a hand for a few days," he said. "I'm out of practice . . ."

They worked until ten o'clock that night. Then the sun went down west of the opal-tinted hills. The daylight was gone suddenly. The Mexicans dropped their picks and shovels and began to walk back along the grade.

Buckley came striding after them. "You!" he yelled hoarsely. "You greasers! Where you going? Where's the mayor? Diego!"

A big, fat Mexican with an enormous straw hat and a dusty blanket over his shoulder walked out of the group. *"Si, señor,"* he said placatingly.

"Get your men back on the job!"

Diego temporized. "Meester Boss, the sun—she's gone. We no work no more today."

Buckley roared, "You're getting paid for it, aren't you?"

"We go home now to our *niños,"* Diego explained with an ingratiating show of white teeth. "We come back tomorrow morning—*Mañana."*

Buckley exploded. *"Mañana,* hell! We've got a railroad to build. You grab that pick and start digging—now! *Pronto!"*

Diego turned back to his brown-skinned countrymen. They talked in high, excited Spanish, with many gesticulations. Then Diego turned back to Buckley. "We no work tonight," he explained patiently. "We go—"

Buckley hit him. They heard the smack of hard bone against the Mexican's face. Buckley hit him again and knocked the Mexican against the side of the grade. Then he yelled, "Get back to work, you sons-of-seacooks! *Andale!"*

They went slowly, muttering. Two of them helped Diego to his feet. A knife made a dull flash in the air and buried itself in Buckley's hat. Buckley caught the hat as it fell, plucked out the knife, and tossed it back across the grade.

He heard Gholson say plainly, "He can bat the Mexicans around easy enough . . ."

Buckley looked at O'Connell and saw the same feeling expressed in O'Connell's face. Buckley sighed and began to stretch his great shoulders.

THEY were up the next morning before daylight. At four o'clock, thirteen of them got into a spring-wagon pulled by a span of mules. Buckley gave a last-minute order to his segundo: "Get that grade north!" He got a small bottle of mescal from the timekeeper's shack, and they set off for Guaymas.

It was afternoon when they pulled in. Buckley had killed the mescal and thrown away the bottle, while Gholson watched him with sardonic eyes.

In Guaymas a few scrawny chickens were picking up weed seeds, and small razor-backed pigs ran in between the adobe huts when the spring-wagon's wheels cut through the fetlock-deep dust. There was scurrying and muttered *"Gringoes!"* as the wagon went through the town and down to the water.

The trestlework from the island was finished. It had no solid floor but was laid with ties and ready for rails. Buckley led the twelve men. They walked the ties to the island, where a windjammer was unloading rails with a steam winch.

A gang of Mexicans was at the dock, and Buckley organized them, five pairs of men to a rail. They set the first pair of rails on the ties, and Buckley lined them up. Two men went in and set the spikes. Then Buckley waved his big arm at the spike-maulers.

They nailed it down—all but Gholson, who was unpaired. He stood easily, leaning on the handle of the big steel-maul. Buckley had the Mexicans bring up the second pair of rails, while he stood at the far end and sighted down the steel and straightened it. Then he handed the width gauge to one of the helpers. "Keep 'em going," he said. "I'll spike."

He expanded his big chest and looked at Gholson. Gholson looked back. Gholson's expression did not change. There was satisfaction in it. This was to his liking.

Buckley's pale blue eyes were flat and

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hard. He spat on his hands, hefted a spike-maul, and stepped into place. He faced forward and that left Gholson to face backward. They took alternate blows. Buckley swung fast, and Gholson had to watch to keep in time. Gholson was swinging right-handed. Buckley hardly changed his position over the rail. He swung right-handed on the outside and left-handed on the inside. He took the first swing and he didn't miss. It was always a good solid blow, and no spikes shot out from under the head of his heavy maul.

Steel went out on the trestle, and within a hour there was a flat-car on the rails alongside the ship. They piled rails on the flat-car and a dozen Mexicans rolled it out on the bridge to the spiking gang. They began to spike in earnest, for the flat-car was always just behind them and the Mexicans did not have to carry rails all the way from the ship.

The sweat began to pour out of Buckley and it seemed to loosen his muscles. It didn't sober him, for his voice was thick as he roared at the Mexicans, *"Andale! Andale!"* But the pace of his spiking did not ease; he swung, it seemed, ever harder and always faster.

Energies were drained by the blazing sun; empty stomachs were painful, but always there was the iron head of Buckley's maul, rising and falling, rising and falling, with the dull clank of maul-heads against iron spikes, and Buckley's hoarse *"Andale!"* which kept the Mexicans running forward, dropping rail after rail with crashes that shivered the trestle.

Gholson kept driving. He watched his aim. There was power in his long, solid blows, and satisfaction on his dark face as he watched Buckley's thick neck grow redder and redder.

By six o'clock they were three fourths of the way to the shore at Guaymas, and two Mexicans came from shore, picking their way across the ties, each carrying a big bucket in each hand. One of the Mexicans was the big-stomached Diego.

O'Connell and his spiking partner, at the end of the rail, laid down their mauls and went to meet the Mexicans. Gholson backed up two ties and finished driving the next spike with Buckley. O'Connell was biting ravenously into a sandwich made of great slabs of heavy white bread and thick slices of burro meat.

Gholson started to lay down his maul, but a blast from Buckley froze him. "Where you going?"

He looked up. Buckley was glaring at him. Gholson took a deep breath, and his face showed that he was ready. He straightened up slowly, still holding the handle of his spike-maul. The two Mexicans went past them. Gholson said, "I'm going to eat."

Buckley roared. "There's another spike to drive!"

Gholson spat out the words contemptuously, "Drive it."

Buckley began to swell up. He said ominously, "Pick up that spike-maul and drive that spike or defend yourself."

Big Diego was standing just behind Buckley. Diego's white teeth were showing.

"Come on, tough guy!" Buckley roared. "What are you waiting on?"

Gholson recovered his spike-maul in one smooth motion that seemed to suck it up into his hands. He stepped forward onto the next tie and swung the heavy iron head in an arc that would have crushed Buckley's head.

Buckley stepped back heavily. He brought up his hammer and his face began to turn blue. He lashed out with the maul before Gholson had stopped his own.

Gholson sucked in his stomach as the iron maul-head whistled by. It grazed his belt-buckle. He stepped back, feeling with his foot for the tie behind him. Buckley roared and followed.

Gholson was off-balance for a moment. He dodged the next swing, but the maul caught him hard in the ribs. They cracked. He swung his maul back-handed and the handle caught Buckley across the forearm.

Buckley crowded him, stalked him along the ties, his face blue, his breath coming in stertorous grunts. The men on the spiking crew backed away with watchful eyes, saying nothing. Diego still stood back next to the flat-car watching.

The sweat squeezed out on Gholson's forehead. He swung the maul again and again, but it seemed to be getting heavy. He put a solid blow on Buckley's thigh, but the man didn't even wince.

He stepped away and smashed Buckley's shoulder. Buckley grunted and his left arm fell limp, but he swung the maul with his big right arm as if it didn't make any difference. Gholson barely had time to meet the maul-head with his own. The steel clanged and the heads rebounded sharply.

Buckley recovered first. His hand slid up the handle of the maul to shorten his grip. He swung at Gholson's neck. Gholson dodged back. Gholson tried to counter, but this time there was no strength in his blow. He was breathing harshly and unevenly.

Buckley's big arm was swinging the maul in an eight-foot circle. It whistled once around his head and went at Gholson's face. Gholson was moving back, Buckley after him. Gholson stepped on the handle of O'Connell's maul and stumbled. Buckley's maul went past his cheekbones.

Gholson was down on the ties.

He straightened with a surge of desperation and threw his maul at Buckley's face. Buckley ducked, and the maul went over his head, described a long arc, and splashed into the water. Buckley stood there, waiting for him to get up. His maul was cocked over his shoulder. He said, "Come on up, tough guy! If you're not whipped—you're sitting on a spike-maul."

Gholson took a deep breath. His sweaty face held a look of dazed suprise. He got up empty-handed. Buckley glared at him and slowly Buckley's face turned mahogany again. He said more quietly, "You find what you were looking for when you came out here?"

Gholson stood there on the ties and looked at Big Blue. Gholson's words came with difficulty, from hot and laboring lungs. "I'll drive that other spike," he said.

Buckley's pale blue eyes showed nothing. His face was expressionless. He waited, watching, as Gholson picked up O'Connell's maul. They drove the spike. Buckley watched Gholson as the man laid down the maul. Then Buckley said, "If you want to know about your brother, I'll tell you. Or ask O'Connell or anybody who saw it."

Gholson stood up straight for a second. His face was white from exhaustion. He said, "I reckon Vince asked for it. That was a habit of his." Gholson's eyes were inscrutable as he added, "I reckon you gave him the same chance that you gave me."

He turned and went slowly toward the buckets of food, while Diego, standing behind Buckley, grinned and showed his white teeth.

"It take a veree tough hombre," he remarked, "to build a railroad."

Highballing the T-Bones

WHAT passenger gets a complete physical checkup before he rides the rails? It's Ferdinand, the bull, and all of his fellow travelers on the stockcars. He gets fast transportation, too—27 hours from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles—when he rides the Union Pacific hotshot *DLS*. For the graphic story of a train which is revolutionizing livestock transportation, read "Highballing the T-Bones," by John A. Thompson, in the big December issue of

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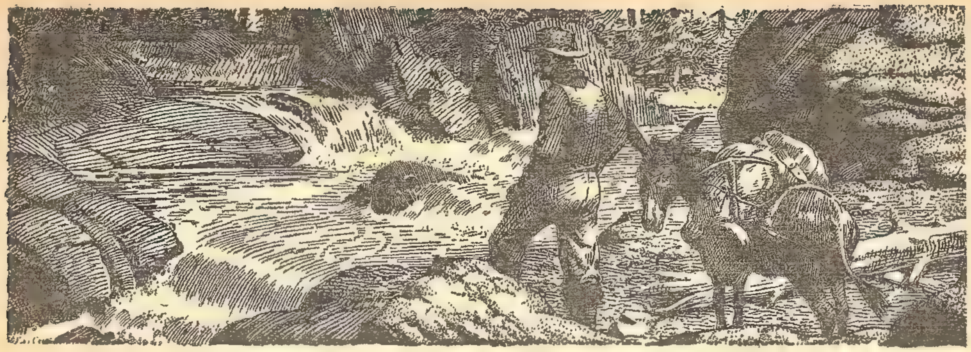

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

GOLD diggers of '49—*1949*, that is.

Query:—Three pals and myself are contemplating a trek out West. What we would like to know is:

Is there any more gold left in them thar hills of Californy? Are there any likely creeks or rivers not already panned out? How would we locate them? What supplies and equipment would we need for a four months' stay? Could we live in a tent or would we need something more substantial? Where could I obtain maps to help guide us in our search?

—Stanley A. Sparling
Monticello, New York

Reply by Victor Shaw:—About California gold placers today: you're some 30-40 years late for any of the "cream." That's been largely skimmed off in the past 100 years—and the Mex gold diggers worked lots of the creeks *before that*! There still remain some *deep* bedrock gravels, but they're only recovered by costly dredges and/or hydraulic apparatus. Most all streams have been rather well worked for the shallow (12 to 18 ft. under surface) placers that are rich enough to pay when worked by hand methods.

So, all you can expect, other than panning a few "colors," may be a possible pocket that is maybe a recent concentration, or possibly an old diggings that was not wholly worked out. There used to be a lot of old dumps left from early days when recovery methods were crude, or very careless; but for the past 25 years the gravel sifters got onto it and today few old dumps like that remain, if any—which I doubt.

However, there is just one area where you might find pockets with gold enough for bean-money—mebbe so, or mebbe not. Anyway, it's O.K. to take a shot at it. This region includes all creeks heading in the Salmon Mts. lying on the county line between counties of Siskiyou and Trinity in northern California. And I mean the creeks on both sides of the range, those flowing north into the Salmon River branch of the Klamath River, and also all flowing south into Trinity River.

Salmon Range is high, a spur off the Coast Range, lying in a "V" with its sharp end pointing south. It starts at Weed, a town a bit north of Mt. Shasta on U.S. 99, and runs S.W. to Weaverville, then N.W. to the middle Klamath River. Creeks on both sides have produced a lot of placer gold especially *coarse* gold and plenty on lower portions; but although much of it was prospected in early days and in many places is now being worked, I'm reasonably sure that they *haven't* found it all! Particularly both sides of its western arm from New River on the south side and on to Klamath River.

Most all of this range is in the big serpentine belt, so that you are likely to find platinum in the black sand containing gold. Platinum, you know, is worth more per ounce than gold. You can't wholly part gold and platinum in the field, for they're about the same weight; but you can remove most of the iron in black sand with a common magnet, to then sell the residue of rather impure gold-platinum concentrate together.

What you'll hunt for mostly are "pockets," though you might stumble upon some untouched gravels with virgin gold at the *heads* of a creek or two that have been overlooked and never worked. Anyway, you'll have to take your chances, conditions being what they are.

Go any time in May, when most snow is off the high hills and not so much high-water in creeks. Plenty trout and game there in *open* season, so better get the State game laws. Any recent road map will show you all this area and how to get there, but a county map is better. Get one of World's Minerals, 2417 San Pablo Ave; Oakland 12 Calif. $2.00 for Siskiyou Co. and $3.00 for Trinity Co. Trout fishing open there May to October. Get game laws of any Forest Ranger. Deer license non-residents $10, open season Salmon Mts. area Sept. 16-Oct. 15. Quail, pheasant, ducks Nov. 20-Dec. 15—no open season on grouse and partridge.

Use regulation camp outfit with tent. Buy grub at Redding on U.S. 99, where paved road goes down Trinity River. Better outfit for the tools and camp stuff needed in San Francisco, as cheaper there. And you will find a U.S. Forest Office there; also get maps, game laws, and visit State Bureau of Mines in the Ferry Bldg., for mining laws and latest report on placering in Trinity-Siskiyou counties. They'll probably tell you there is none except for dredging & hydraulicking, but better trust what I tell you here for the reasons I've stated. Now for needed tools.

Get a 12-in. goldpan cost about 50-75c; a magnifying glass about $1; a 6-inch "horse-shoe" magnet about 50c; a 3-lb. *miner's* pick $2; No. 2 round-point shovel with D-handle $2; ½-pint cast-iron mortar & pestle probably cost $2.50-$3; ½ a chamois skin or buckskin about $2. *NB*:—the mortar above at $3.50 *should* be for a "combined mortar & retort": anyway, get such a combination of both, for you use chamois to squeeze out excess mercury from the amalgam made with mercury which takes up gold in part and forms the said "amalgam." The hard ball of amalgam is then retorted. Get it? This means you must buy about a 1-lb. jug of merucry at $1.50-$2.00, or whatever the current price is now! It varies somewhat.

The above tools are O.K. for 4 men working with a goldpan on a prospecting trip like this; but, if you're lucky and hit a good bunch of fair gravels, you'll need at least a small sluice made of 1-inch boards planed smooth on *one* side, with cross rifles nailed in bottom of 1"X2" strips the width of sluice box which is about 12" wide by 14' long.

Can get the materials probably in Redding *if* needed. No need to bother on your purely prospecting trip, or till you locate a pay deposit. If you do find pay, have to come out anyway to record claim at the local Recorder's Office, and can get sluice materials then.

Copy of mining law tells how to stake and record claims.

I think you may get tools of Yuba Mfg. Co., 351 California St. in San Francisco. If not, they'll direct to such a store, in the city.

Your grub shouldn't run much over 50c a day per man *if that*! Even at present high prices, I think $100 worth of essential plain staples like flour, cornmeal, sugar, oats, bacon, beans etc. would with careful buying and right quantities last 4 men 4 months. Trout will be a help on meats. You know, one sack of spuds goes a long way.

To *get* there: can take train to Redding, then hire someone to truck you and outfit west on Trinity River Hwy to Burnt Ranch or Salyer. Probably Salyer, where can hire pack outfit to go into Salmon Mts. Total cost may be $250 each, though might get by on $800 gross.

FIGHTING with fists, firearms and foils.

Query:—I do not know if the following questions are in your line, but I hope so. At any rate here they are:

(1) Could you give me any information on the boxing background and present activities of Arthur Donovan, who used to referee so many prominent heavyweight fights?

(2) Just what is Ray Arcel's position in the game?

(3) Did Jack Dempsey have any financial interest in Max Baer's career? That is, did he sponsor him or act as his agent in any manner?

(4) When pistol duels were common in this country just how accurate were the weapons at the range used? Briefly, what was the routine followed during such a duel?

(5) Are any fencing exhibitions or contests held in this country?

—William Reese
Florence, Colorado

Reply by Col. Jean V. Grombach:—All of your questions fall in my two departments—boxing and fencing—so I shall attempt to answer them for you.

1. Arthur Donovan is the son of a famous boxing father who was one of the great middleweights in the history of boxing just prior to the John L. Sullivan era. Donovan was famous for having thrown in the towel as Jake Kilrain's second in the 75th round of the memorable Sullivan-Kilrain world's heavyweight bare-knuckled championship at Richbourg, Miss. The temperature was 105 in the shade, and Kilrain was practically helpless, but refused to quit. A doctor in Kilrain's corner told Donovan that if Kilrain continued he probably would be killed, so Donovan wisely threw in the sponge. Donovan was also famous as the first boxing instructor of the New York Athletic Club and boxing instructor to the White House and to President Teddy Roosevelt. Unfortunately in one of his practice bouts with the President, who was pretty tough with his fists, Donovan accidentally put out one of the President's eyes.

Arthur Donovan (the son) was an outstanding amateur boxer and later turned professional, but his career was handicapped by an interruption occasioned by World

War I. Donovan followed his father as coach of the New York Athletic Club, but tragedy followed him also, for he accidentally killed one of his pupils and friends in a scuffle on the street. At one time around 1934 and 1935, he was the No. 1 referee in America, and refereed most of the world's championship fights in New York State. He is at the present time still an official of the New York State Boxing Commission and still is instructor of boxing at the New York Athletic Club in New York City.

2. Ray Arcel is considered one of the greatest trainers and seconds in the boxing business. He also manages fighters, and has occasionally participated in promoting fights. However, his position is mostly that of a great trainer and second. At one time he was associated with Whitey Bimstein, another great fight conditioner, trainer, and second. It was said that when a fighter had those two in his corner, he could tell what the opponent would do before the opponent even knew himself. However, this team broke up and they have operated separately since. At the present time Ray Arcel's greatest interest is in a fighter whom he is managing and training named Yarocz. Yarocz is a light heavyweight and recently defeated Dave Shade, the middleweight, light heavyweight, and heavyweight champion of Australia.

3. Jack Dempsey had a financial interest in Max Baer. He was partially responsible for Baer's getting a chance to demonstrate his abilities and negotiated the release of Baer from his original manager, Lorimer, and his being taken over by Ancil Hoffman, who contributed greatly to Baer's finally winning the world's championship. Dempsey for a long while had a promotion option on Max Baer, and drew a 10 per cent cut on the Baer-Carnera world's championship fight. Dempsey personally promoted the Baer-Schmeling fight at Yankee Stadium in which a Jew knocked out Hitler's "Aryan" champion.

4. When pistol duels were common in this country, pistols were fairly accurate up to 100 paces (about 300 feet). The two generally accepted routines were as follows:

(a) The duellists stood back to back and paced off an agreed number of paces—turned and fired at each other.

(b) The duellists stood at an agreed number of paces apart facing each other with the pistol pointed at the ground, arm down. The director then counted "1—2—FIRE!" and at the command "FIRE!" the duellists could raise their pistols and fire at each other in any way they decided. Very often one would hold his fire and after being missed would ask his opponent if he would apologize.

5. Fencing exhibitions and contests are held in this country for various intercollegiate and national championships under the auspices of the Amateur Fencers' League of America or the Intercollegiate Association. Foils and saber competitions are determined by judges and directors, while all important championships in epee are conducted by electrical systems and the winner determined by the ring of a bell and the flash of a light.

ALONG the Alaska Highway.

Query:—I am contemplating a trip to Alaska next summer and would like to go by car if possible. Can you give me any information regarding the Alcan Highway—the condition of the road, availability of gasoline, stopping places etc., also where I can get a map of the route.

—W. L. Schuck
Winter Garden,
Florida

Reply by Philip H. Godsell:—You ask me if I can give you any information concerning the "Alcan" Highway. Since I hunted with Beaver Indians over what is now the Alaska Highway as far back as 1911, and between 1925 and 1927 blazed what became the first 300-mile link in the Highway, from Fort St. John to Fort Nelson, B.C., and since I was over part of it as recently as a couple of years ago, I should know something about it. Incidentally the name "Alcan" was dropped some time ago in favor of "Alaska Highway" by which it is now officially known.

The Alaska Highway commences at Dawson Creek, B.C. (Mile 0) and enters Alaska at Mile 1221.4. Dawson Creek is the end of steel (railroad)of the Northern Alberta Railway and is approximately 475 miles north of Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, a provincial highway connecting the two points. It is gravelled the greater part of the way, but is none too good in bad weather, especially in June (I refer to the 475-mile link). As for the Alaska Highway it is a first class road and kept in good condition but very dusty in dry weather. The Highway was thrown open to the public over a year ago and *no* special permit is required to pass over it, other than your entrance papers into Canada.

The roadside accommodations and facilities available along the Alaska Highway last summer were as follows: Mile 0, Dawson Creek, Hotel, stores, gas, oil, repairs. Mile 49, Ft. St. John, ditto. Mile 101, Blueberry, gas and oil. Mile 147, Beatton River, meals only. Mile 201, Trutch, gas and oil. Mile 235, Prophet River, store and meals. Mile 300, Ft. Nelson, meals store gas and oil, hotel, repairs. Mile 392, Summit Lake, meals, gas and oil, minor repairs. Mile 456, Muncho Lake, meals gas and oil. Mile 533, Coal River, hotel, meals, gas and oil. Mile 620, Lower Post, ditto. Mile 634, Watson Lake, ditto. Mile 710, Rancheria, (Yukon Territory), meals, gas and oil. Mile 804, Teslin, store, meals, gas and oil. Mile 883, Marsh Lake, hotel, meals, gas and oil. Mile

918, Whitehorse, hotel, meals, gas and oil, repairs, stores. The same situation prevails along the remainder of the route from Whitehorse to Mile 1525, Whitehorse. Many of these stopping places are abandoned buildings left from construction days and are a little on the primitive side. On the other hand Fort St. John, Fort Nelson and similar places are well provided and quite up-to-date. Regarding gasoline costs, these will run higher as you go North and run up to 50 cents or more a gallon. Trappers, prospectors, traders and others using this route carry with them spare parts, tent, grub and cooking outfit—a couple of pots and a frying pan—axes, two spare tires, tubes, tube repair kit, tire chains, tire pump, tire gauge, jack, car tools, tow rope or cable, shovel and first aid kit. It is considered advisable also to carry spark plugs, fan-belt, distributor coil and points, light fuses, condenser, fuel-pump kit, brake fluid, axle, generator brushes and clutch parts.

It would be a good idea to take along your own grub box, tin plates, knives etc., and re-stock it as you go along, then you'll be independent of the stopping places which are inclined to run rather expensive, though they usually put up good grub and plenty of it. The Highway is still a frontier and unsettled region and it would be advisable to come as well equipped as possible, eliminating unnecessary and weighty baggage. Don't forget a bedroll and mosquito curtain for your bed—and hat as well. It's pretty hot up there in the summertime, often hitting 90 and even 100, but sometimes chilly at nights.

For an Alaska Highway map write Dan Campbell, Publicity & Travel Bureau, Parliament Buildings, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

THE Congressional Medal of Honor.

Query:—I should like to bother you for a little "Ask Adventure" information. I am making a collection of popular misconceptions, perhaps for eventual publication. I believe that I am on the trail of one now and it is possible that you can help me out.

The story has long been current among civilians and naval and military personal as well, that all officers, junior, senior or flag, must salute the wearer of the The Medal of Honor (usually called the Congressional Medal of Honor) even though the wearer be an enlisted man. The story sometimes varies a little. I have also heard that the wearer of the C. M. of H. may also order the skipper's gig alongside and go ashore ahead of the Old Man himself.

I cannot recall that at any time during my seven years in the U.S.N. I was instructed for gangway or quartermaster watch to accord any such honor, official or traditional, to the wearer of the C. M. of H. It is, of course, possible that I am mistaken or that I simply don't remember, but I don't believe that there is any basis to this story, official or traditional. With the medal, I think you probably get two bucks a month extra—and that's all.

I have consulted all the reference works in the local library that I have been able to find on this subject. These include all the articles in all the encyclopedia available (including the long article in XI Edition of The Britannica), The Watch Officer's Guide Book, section on honors accorded distinguished guests; Naval Customs and Traditions, Sections on honors, courtesy, naval etiquette; the article on the M. of H. in the National Geographic for June, 1943 and F. M. Rech's book on the M. of H. which devotes a chapter to the history of the medal.

Nowhere can I find any reference, official or traditional, to this story and I wonder if the yarn isn't just another misconception that has gained currency through repetition.

Of course, as far as I know, anyone but a brig prisoner may salute anyone else if he so chooses. But the fact that someone once did accord the honor of a salute to a holder of the M. of H. would not, I think, make it a traditional custom.

If you can quote me any official basis for this story, or indicate even if there is any traditional basis for the story, I should greatly appreciate it. If the story is false and you have any idea how it got started, I wonder if you could enlighten me about that too.

—Thomas Q. Lempertz
Hollywood, Calif.

Reply by Frank Herold:—You are right. The privileges mentioned by you as accorded the holder of the Congressional Medal of Honor come under the heading of popular misconceptions. Personally, I'm sure that we all hold the owner of the Medal of Honor so highly that we'd let him get away with anything short of murder—but that still doesn't make it official. I too, have heard yarns in which the sky seemed to be the limit, and in some individual cases it might have been so, for the reason I just gave. There doesn't seem to be a thing "in writing" on it anyplace, including the Navy Department.

Medal of Honor winners receive no special courtesies other than free transportation on service aircraft, or other service transportation, when space is available.

Enlisted recipients receive $2.00 per month increase in their pay during their service and at the age of 65 may apply for a $10.00 monthly pension for life. This is given only if the award is presented for combat service.

Officers receive no monetary gain, but if the award was earned during combat an officer receives a promotion to the next highest rank upon retirement.

Old regulations now out of existence include: $100.00 cash settlement to recipients (done away with by Public Law 702 when the $2.00 per month provision came in). Automatic promotions also went out with #702. However, legislation is now pending before Congress on the subject—(Senate 1264).

A BIT of ornithology.

Query:—As the Salt Water Fishing Expert for *Adventure,* maybe you can answer a question about the species of a great flock of birds seen off the California coast last May.

About fifteen miles offshore, cruising between Pt. Sur and Pt. Reyes, we noted the water literally swarming with birds, a dirty brown (though we couldn't see them too well), and about half the size of seagulls. Some seemed to be diving, others swimming swiftly and close to the sea, which was very smooth, but most of them were just sitting there. Various opinions were expressed, one that they were "pilot birds," another that they were some kind of ducks, but nobody really knew.

I hope you can put us straight on what they actually were.

—Keith Woodmansee
Santa Monica, Calif.

Reply by C. Blackburn Miller:—Concerning the large flock of birds which you saw off the coast, I am of the opinion, from your description of these birds and their actions, that they are the Colombian Booby. Their color which is a dirty brown as you mention and their diving activities, also the fact that they were in a large flock, leads me to this view.

This species, however, rarely comes as far north as that, which is the reason that you have not noticed them before.

A REFUGE for wildlife—but not for men!

Query:—I intend to take a trip, with a friend of mine, into the Okefenokee Swamp, Fla. next summer and would appreciate any information of value you could give me on this subject.

I would like to know what I should take in the way of firearms, if any, and also what type of camping equipment you would suggest. Are reliable guides available in this area and if so could you give a few names and perhaps an estimate of prices they would charge. I am doing this work to apply to my Master's Degree in Entomology and would appreciate any help you could give me.

—R. M. Lawrence
Amherst, Mass.

Reply by Hapsburg Liebe:—So you, with a friend, intend taking a trip into the Okefenokee Swamp this coming summer. This swamp, incidentally, is more in Georgia than in Florida. The nearest town of goodly size is Waycross, Ware County, Ga.

I have been in these big swamps, hunting or fishing or both, and have camped in them, but *never* in the summertime, for then the mosquitoes, snakes, 'gators, and all other "varmints" would be at their very worst. I wouldn't venture into any big swamp, in the *winter,* without *snakebite medicine and a guide.* Even the guides get lost sometimes in those places.

I've always left the camping outfit to the guide, since he would know exactly the stuff to take along. As for firearms, I hardly know what to say. There's probably a closed season on all game in the summer. If there wasn't, they'd stick you a high price for a non-resident hunting license, likely. Most of the Georgia Okefenokee is a wildlife refuge now.

Considerable time has passed since I was in that section, so for up-to-the minute information I'm going to refer you to the following: (Enclose stamped envelopes for replies—

Georgia State Game and Fish Warden or Commission, Atlanta, Ga.
Ware County Game and Fish Warden or Commission, Waycross, Ga.
Game Warden, Folkston, Charlton County, Ga.
Game Warden, Fargo, Clinch County, Ga.

Not sure there's a warden at either Folkston or Fargo. Just didn't want to pass up any bets. If there is a warden or deputy warden at either of these smaller places he would probably know more about "ole Okefen*oke*" than the man at Waycross.

BUT *I* wouldn't like to go into Okefenokee in the summertime. You see, I *know* these damned cottonmouth moccasins. And the big rattlers too.

THE little pistol with the big bore.

Query:—I hope you may be able to give me some information on Derringers.

Are these guns still being manufactured? If not, where could I get a used one? Are these guns an effective short-range weapon? Is ammunition readily available? About what price can I expect to pay?

—Carl A. Johnson
Chicago, Ill.

Reply by Donegan Wiggins:—The old .41 rimfire Derringer pistols are a thing of the past, as far as purchasing a new one over a counter is concerned; your only chance now is to find one in some second-hand place, or pawnshop. Collectors often have specimens for sale, also.

(Continued on page 123)

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine, unless so indicated (c/o *Adventure*). Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

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SPORTS AND HOBBIES

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Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure*.

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Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 1117 Myrtle Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 2, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U.S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure*.

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, c/o *Adventure*.

Horology: *The science of time and timekeepers*—JOHN W. MCGRATH, 434 W. 120th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America, Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure*.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—Paul L. Anderson, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

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Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. Newman, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling: Hapsburg Liebe, c/o *Adventure.*

Wildcrafting and Trapping—Raymond S. Spears, 1117 Myrtle Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—Col. R. G. Emery, U.S.A. Ret., c/o *Adventure.*

United States Coast Guard—Lieut. C. B. Lemon, U.S.C.G., Ret., Box 221, Equinunk, Wayne Co., Penna.

United States Marine Corps—Maj. Robert H. Rankin, U.S.M.C.R., c/o *Adventure.*

United States Navy—Frank Herold, 1647 Charon Rd., Jacksonville, Fla.

Merchant Marine—Kermit W. Salyer, c/o *Adventure.*

Military Aviation—O. B. Myers, c/o *Adventure.*

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—Francis H. Bent, c/o *Adventure.*

The French Foreign Legion—Georges Surdez, c/o *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. Kemp, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

State Police—Francis H. Bent, c/o *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. Armit, c/o *Adventure.*

★**New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa**—Tom L. Mills, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—Alan Foley, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—William McCreadie, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii, Christmas, Wake, Canton, Midway and Palmyra Islands—Carl J. Kunz, 211-3 Naska, Kahului, Maui, T.H.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—Capt. H. W. Eades, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. 2 *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—Gordon MacCreagh, c/o *Adventure.* 3 *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—Captain Beverly-Giddings, c/o *Adventure.* 4 *Bechuanaland, Southern Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—Major S. L. Glenister, c/o *Adventure.*

Madagascar—Ralph Linton, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. Windle, Box 813, Rancho Santa Fe, Calif. 2 *Persia, Arabia*—Captain Beverly-Giddings, c/o *Adventure.* 3 ★*Palestine*—Captain H. W. Eades, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. 4 ★*Afghanistan, Northern India, Kashmir, Khyber Pass*—Roland Wild, Savage Club, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London, S.W.1, England.

★**The British Isles**—Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., London, W. C. 2, England.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile*—Edgar Young, c/o *Adventure.* 2 *Brazil*—Arthur J. Burks, c/o *Adventure.*

West Indies—John B. Leffingwell, c/o *Adventure.*

Baffinland and Greenland—Victor Shaw, c/o *Adventure.*

★**Newfoundland**—Capt. Leo C. Murphy, J.P., Great War Veterans' Office, St. John's, Newfoundland.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. 2 ★*West Coast beginning with State of Sinaloa; Central and Southern Mexico, including Tabasco and Chiapas*—Wallace Montgomery, Central Sanalona, S. A., Costa Rica, Sinaloa, Mexico.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—William MacMillan, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. 2 ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—Harry M. Moore, 579 Isabella, Pembroke, Ont., Canada. 3 ★*Georgia Bay and Southern Ontario; National Parks Camping*—A. D. L. Robinson, 103 Wembly Rd., Toronto, Ont., Canada. 4 ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian Life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. Kemp, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada. 5 ★*Yukon, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Western Arctic*—Philip H. Godsell, F.R.G.S., General Delivery, Airdrie, Alberta, Canada.

Alaska—Frank Richardson Pierce, c/o *Adventure.*

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Middle Western U. S.—*Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana Swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—Raymond S. Spears, 1117 Myrtle Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"Chief" Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. 2 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—Howard R. Voight, P. O. Box 716, Woodmont, Conn. 3 *Adirondacks, New York*—Raymond S. Spears, 1117 Myrtle Ave., Inglewood, Calif. 4 *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—Hapsburg Liebe, c/o *Adventure.* 5 *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tenn.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Once in a while it happens . . . A story comes along that's got everything to make it a really great narrative of adventure. Such a story is the lead novelette in the January issue—a tale of swashbuckling action and color, intrigue, treachery and swordplay. Based on the true incident of Captain Francis Pelsart's shipwreck off the coast of Australia in the year 1629, it relates in absorbing detail the grim and terrible events that followed the loss of the Indiaman *Batavia*, in a violent storm near the shores of the South Continent . . . Here you will meet Jerome Cornelis, supercargo of the *Batavia*, to whom tyranny and assassination are no more than the right of the strong man to enslave or destroy friend or foe alike, to slake his lust for power and gold . . . Lucretia de Yonge, a woman of compelling beauty and the scruples of Satan . . . Thomas de Villier, cavalier of France, whose deadly rapier is no sharper than his wit . . . Webbye Hays, loyal Dutchman, soldier and gentleman, whose courage meets its supreme test in the bloody mutiny sponsored by Cornelis . . . Jan de Breuer, the bestial killer . . . And a host of others who play their parts in a gaudy pageant of violence and valor. Don't miss—

TO BARBARY OR TO HELL

By JULES ARCHER

Plus: "The Postwar Plan of Jason Korvene"—an unusual tale of what happened to an ex-GI who returned to a forgotten Pacific isle, by John Keasler . . . A hilarious new Charley Hoe Handle story, by Jim Kjelgaard . . . "The Three Left Legs"—the story of a fabulous jewel and the strange fate that befell the men who possessed it, by Robert F. Germann . . . Many other exciting stories, articles and departments—all in the great January 1950 issue of—

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ON SALE DECEMBER 9th

(Continued from page 8)

myself in occasional free moments with adventure on the printed page. Ever since I can remember, writing has been my hobby and relaxation.

I became a pirate historian by accident. I was doing research on Katherine Howard, one of the wanton wives of that wanton monarch, Henry VIII, for a historical novel as yet only in the outline stage. This unfortunate lady had several secret lovers, one of whom was a pirate. In trying to learn about piracy in Tudor times, I became interested in piracy in general and acquired a pirate library, including several rare books of 18th and 19th century vintage. One of these books, by a pirate who knew Blackbeard personally, is the chief source of my fact story, "Raider of the Spanish Main."

Piracy is the forgotten aspect of adventurous fact. Although the adventures of these sad dogs are as colorful, bloody, incredible and fascinating as anything fiction can supply, the pirate has been ignored by the modern adventure lover. Everyone has heard of Captain Kidd—well, Kidd was not a pirate at all, and his exploits are legendary. Sir Henry Morgan is famous, but he wasn't a pirate either—he was a buccaneer, which is different. Who today has heard of Bartholomew Roberts, who destroyed 500 ships in five years; of Long Ben Avery, who plundered the treasures of the East Indies; of Mary Read and Anne Bonney, female pirates who went about disguised as men; of Bellamy and Williams, whose fabulous treasure lies buried to this day not far off Cape Cod; of Low, Lowther, and Springs, the sadists; of Condent, the cannibal; of Mission, who founded a large socialistic pirate nation on Madagascar; of Barbarossa, the terrible red-bearded king of the Barbary coast; of the brutal Joasmee pirates of the Persian Gulf; of Madame Ching, Chinese woman pirate who was active as recently as 1922; of Aaron Smith, whose picturesque story reads like the lustiest-bustiest historical novel; of Ruiz, Gilbert, and De Soto whose trial during Andrew Jackson's presidency caused as much excitement in those days as the Lindbergh case did in the '30s?—who has heard of any of these famous pirates? And yet their stories are fully as colorful and complete as that of the cruel Blackbeard.

TWO fine salty yarns of the sea in this issue—"Quite A Blow," by Standby (pen name of R. S. Porteous, the well-known Australian author), in which you'll make the acquaintance of Captain Swinsby, master of the *Tekowi* and a lot of man despite his insignificant appearance. And the other sea story—"Pilot's Choice"—by Leslie C. Burbridge. Captain Burbridge, writing from his home in England, introduces himself to you as follows—

I have always assessed the American market as pretty tough sledding, especially for a Limey, and I am naturally delighted at whanging the target with *Adventure*.

Personally I have always had my tongue hanging out for the How-I-Dunnit angle of new writers. Well, the writing bug has nagged me ever since my imagination was stimulated by an engrossing world when I went to see in Cardiff Tramps at the age of 14. My Elementary or Grade school education was not extensive, but it did equip me with enough English to get my interested observations down onto paper in letters home. From then it was the familiar "You really ought to write a book" stimulation. But it was not until I was 25 or so that I tried out a sea yarn on the old *Blue Peter* magazine. I was astounded by an acceptance, since when I have kept up a sporadic assault, much conditioned by a busy life of many changes, and attended by a consistent success rate of 75%. Inspiration doesn't figure very largely. To be inquisitive about life, especially the other man's, seems to be the biggest help: that and much toil, sweat and tears.

Occupation, London Trinity House Pilot, conducting ships from Dungeness, about twenty miles SW of Dover, into London, and anywhere up the North Sea. To give its full title, the Honourable Corporation of Trinity House, of Deptford, Strond, is the oldest pilotage authority in the world. It is administered by a small body of Elder Brethren, all distinguished master mariners from the British Merchant Service: generally masters of ocean liners, and always men who have achieved the top rank in their profession.

As for "Pilot's Choice"—well, between ourselves, much of it happened to me! I thought it a tough knock when a ship I was piloting took the ground in the same place and manner as in the story. I came out well enough, but to ease the bruise on my ego I determined to make the experience pay off. Hence the yarn.

Obtained my first command at 26, became a pilot at 31, and at 41 am still nursing a life-long ambition to live by writing, although piloting is a nice game—except for its hellish moments, which come along in varying degrees with every fog. We had a pretty rough ride during the war, when I saw my home became a hole in the ground filled with rain water and a remarkably fine crop of stinging nettles. Piloting was lively work then. Dover became Hell Fire Corner, and tomorrow was likely not to exist.

Don't let this be an opening for more acerbities in our international slanging match, but I had my first meal on American territory under false pretences on the Polar exploration ship *Bear*, in San Francisco, 1922. I didn't know that your Supper and our Tea were identical meals. Had I had Supper? they asked. No. So they filled me up with ham and eggs. Delicious—far better than our sloppy hash which we'd suffered at tea time. Then I discovered I was "going round the buoy" on the grub stakes. Since then I have been many times in the States—even planned at one time to emigrate. But the accident of circumstance intervened, and I got left at sea. Pity. I even came back Christmas-time 1948, to see if it would be possible, but it's difficult to switch when you've a family to ride herd on. Even so, I was strongly tempted to throw my sticky Limey caution to the wind and remain with you. May yet do it, for although I love the sea, I like it best viewed over a hedge: viewing a hedge from the sea isn't such fun. I have an ambition to live by writing—so anything can happen.

At present, I live in Dover, right on the sea front, and from my windows I can plainly see the coast of France in clear weather.

Afraid these notes sound a bit garbled, but I am dashing them off in a short pause between trips: You just about get time to change one sock between jobs, and we automatically swear each time the phone rings.

SAM STEWART, managing editor of the Ogden, Utah *Standard Examiner,* concocted the rhythmic "Saga of Parson Jack." (Page 65) Here he gives us a tabloid version of his own career—

I've been a working newspaperman all my adult life, mostly in Colorado with the last 3½ years in Utah. I have written sports, crime, prison riots, interviews with the great, near-great and the unknowns; and like most newspapermen, am always "going to" do a lot of writing but don't get around to doing much. Never had any ambition to write the Great American Novel; have peddled a little in the way of fact detective and short fiction; have failed to peddle a lot more. The rhythm of "Parson Jack" probably is a tipoff to the fact that I have read and admired Robert W. Service for lo, these many years; I can come up with a rhyme or a jingle at the drop of a hat, but this is one of the few times I've progressed beyond a limerick or a quatrain.

That do it?

THAT does it, thanks, Mr. Stewart . . . And now we come to a man who, as the toastmaster says, needs no introduction—to *Adventure* readers at least—Philip H. Godsell, F.R.G.S., our Ask Adventure expert on the Yukon, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Alberta and the Western Arctic. (See his letter on the Alaska Highway in the Ask Adventure Dept.) For over thirty years, Phil Godsell has lived amongst the Indian tribes of the Canadian Northwest. An adopted chief of the Cree tribe, he speaks many Indian dialects fluently. Some time ago he visited the One Arrow Reserve and heard, from some of the old Indians there, a first-hand account of the events recorded in his article in this issue—"The Trailing of Almighty Voice"—which he quite justifiably calls "the story of the most amazing chase in the annals of the North West Mounted Police." You'll find it on page 94.

NOEL LOOMIS, author of the Mexican railroading yarn, "Tough Hombre," has a little confession to make—

Back in 1936, Howard Bloomfield bought "Human Fly" for *Adventure* and consummated my first fiction sale. But he first wrote and said he was interested in the story. I was ecstatic. It was February, with snow to the eaves, and when I realized he was asking me to tell him something about myself, I assumed it was for the *Camp-Fire,* and there I would be with writers like Watkins, Lamb, Surdez and the others. I wallowed for days in the incomparable luxury of fame.

But it seemed to me every writer in *Adventure* was born on the back of a bouncing camel, while I was born only in a composing-room.* It didn't seem that my prosaic background would impress the readers, so I souped-up that for two solid typewritten pages. (I'm hiding my face now.) Mr. B. didn't back out on the purchase, although I discovered eventually that it had not been his intention to give me the entire issue; he merely wanted some indication of my reliability as a writer! So my life-story was not used, thank goodness.

Many words have rolled out of the old Rem. Port. since then—close to two million, including a mystery novel in hard covers, mystery and western novels serialized, two science-fiction novels, and short stories to many different magazines in the U. S., and the *Toronto Star* and others in Canada, and, just recently, one to *Argosy.* And here I am back in *Adventure.* It has been a long way around, but I have learned something about writing, and perhaps I'll be here again. Anyway, that early fiasco is off my conscience at last. If Mr. B. sees this, he will understand. I am still not allergic to fame, but maybe I can take it more in stride.

"Tough Hombre" has a historical background: railroading in Mexico. I was raised in the Southwest; my family has roamed that area since one of my grandfathers got back from the California Gold Rush.

I have an intense interest in that section of the U. S. and that time, and it keeps me busy gathering material and researching on early days in the West and Southwest. To me that period is one of dynamic grandeur and glorious drama that will never be re-enacted until we open new fields on other planets. It was a great, flowing, turgid westward movement of men—good, bad, rough, and tough. The tough ones didn't last long, usually, but they went strong while they lasted.

Many of those who went west were misfits, malcontents, criminals, ne'er-do-wells—men who hadn't found their niches. Women were scarce—some good, some not. Men were of many nationalities and many trades: train-robbers, express riders, editors, barbers, blacksmiths. Spaniards and Indians and North Americans rolled against each other in great waves, to the thump of black-powder guns and the zip of war-arrows and the crack of blacksnake whips.

There were mustangs and longhorn cattle and buffalo; snow-storms and prairie fires, grasshoppers, crickets, drouth, floods, dust, heat, and tornadoes. There were wagon-trains miles long, diamond-stacked locomotives, horses and buggies; desert and mountains; mining, lumbering, riverboating, ranching, banking, real estate; gamblers and bootleggers; assayists and Texas Rangers.

When I look at my files and consider all the incredible mixture that went into this great, boiling cauldron of men, animals and country, then I think the "Western" story is not far wrong, for this period was, above all, Man against Nature—and men, being so picturesquely divided among themselves, conquered the land by sheer exuberance and drive. Some of them did find their niches—many six feet down.

This is the story that some day I shall write, but it requires a great canvas and an artist with ability that I cannot yet display.

In the meantime, my particular field in this amazing culture is the country newspaper, for my family on both sides (yes, my mother was a typesetter in Oklahoma Territory in 1904; that's how she met my father) have been newspaper people. My big project is to gather material on early equipment and practices, and at a certain time in the future my wife and I (she sells stories herself) are going to write a quadrology of novels covering newspaper life in the Southwest from 1870 to 1915.

Looking back, I see that my background is no more exciting now than it was in 1936, but this is the kind of story I like to write—high adventure, bad men who are tougher than the hinges of hell itself, other men who don't talk so loudly but who keep punching, and a little sentiment thrown in.

*Yes, I *was* born in a composing-room—but that's another story.

O. K., Mr. Loomis, you've got us curious—next time you visit the *Camp-Fire*, how about letting us in on just how that happened?

SEVERAL years ago, E. A. Brininstool, well-known historian of the Old West, was a frequent contributor to these pages. Since then he has written many books on his favorite subject, the latest of which we have just had the pleasure of reading. You might enjoy it too. It's called "Crazy Horse," after the great Sioux warrior, and tells in absorbing detail the true story of his tragic betrayal and killing at the hands of his white captors, at Fort Robinson in September, 1877. But what we're leading up to is the following account of an incident which happened to Mr. Brininstool himself, a good many years ago. He sent it to us recently, and you might say that it comes under the heading of "now it can be told." This piece on the perils of careless shooting struck us as quite appropriate along with Art Carhart's fine deer-hunting yarn in this issue, "For One Buck—And Other Considerations." Here it is—

To the thousands of careless hunters who are prone to "shoot first and investigate afterwards," I dedicate this little sketch of my own experience with firearms, which happened over fifty years ago. Even to this day the recollection of it sends the shivers through me. It is the only time in my lifetime of experience with firearms that I ever got a real scare.

About 1890, or possibly a year or two before, a concern in Buffalo, N.Y. operating under the name of the "Burgess Repeating Arms Company," began the manufacture of a new kind of repeating shotgun. It was a semi-automatic arm, and operated with a sliding pistol-grip action instead of a sliding fore-end. The recoil of the gun unlocked the mechanism, and the natural "back-pull" on the pistol grip threw out the fired shell, and throwing the pistol grip forward brought a new shell into the chamber. Probably some of you "old boys" will recall this shotgun.

While I was in Buffalo one day on a business trip, I went into the gun store of Salem G. LeValley on Main street. There I met and got acquainted with one of the traveling demonstrators of the Burgess Gun Company. After some conversation along lines of mutual interest, he invited me to spend the balance of the day with him looking over the plant of the new gun company, which was located out on the old Belt Line railroad at Black Rock, a Buffalo suburb. Here we passed an enjoyable afternoon.

When I left the chap—his name, I recall, was Charlie—I mentioned that there was some fine woodchuck shooting in my neck of the woods—Wyoming County—and invited him to come out sometime and put in a couple of days with me, and we would try and make it warm for the woodchucks.

A few days later he walked into my father's store with his grip, two or three gun cases and a load of ammunition, and announced that he was ready for business. Accordingly, the following morning, my chum and I took him in tow, and started up the railroad track over our chosen shooting territory.

Charlie had brought along with him a new Stevens rifle of .25-caliber which had recently come on the market. It was equipped with a powerful Malcolm telescope. It was, of course, a black powder rifle. My chum carried his father's .38-55 Union Hill Ballard, in those days considered the peer of all target rifles. I had one of the same make, but in .32-40 caliber.

About a mile above the town, the railroad ran through quite a patch of timber. I knew that beyond this timber were many woodchuck burrows along the bank of a small stream which meandered through the village from south to north.

As we emerged from the woods I gazed down along the creek, and immediately spotted a dark object right at a point where I knew there was a burrow which contained a particularly wary and wise old 'chuck. I asked Charlie to look through his 'scope and see if it was the 'chuck.

He laid his gun across the top rail of the fence and took a long, careful survey through the glass. "Yep, that's him," he exclaimed, "and boy, he's a bouncer!"

We took his word for it without further investigation, and I suggested that we open the ball right there and then, giving the honor of the first shot to our Buffalo guest.

We all squatted down in the grass where we could get a good dead rest across the old rail fence. Charlie threw a shell into his rifle, and took a long, careful aim, while my chum and I stood directly behind him to note the effect of his shot.

"Crack!" He made a fine line shot, but the little ball struck about twenty-five feet short. The 'chuck did not appear to be the least disturbed, for it continued to "stay on the job." I then told my chum to take the next shot.

He threw in one of his long .38-55's, and after setting his sights—a pinhead front sight with a spirit-level attached, and a mid-range vernier peep—fired. I looked for a dead 'chuck, for my pard was a wonderfully fine rifle shot; but he had placed his peep sight a mite too high, the ball striking about twenty-five or thirty feet ahead of the 'chuck, throwing the dirt several feet into the air. But it was a dandy good line shot.

It struck me at the time as rather strange that the woodchuck did not make for its burrow, even after the first shot, for we had fired at that particular animal so many times, and had gotten him so well "educated" that a single shot was usually all we could depend on. The animal would dive into its hole and stay there.

Then the boys clamored for me to "blow his bean off." Only a day or so previously I had shot at this wise old woodchuck, and my sights were set absolutely perfect for that distance at which we were shooting; and as I laid my old Ballard across the rail I was as confident that there would be a dead 'chuck as I was that the sun would rise the following morning.

My Ballard carried a set trigger. I pulled the rear trigger until I heard the familiar "click", and just as my finger was about to touch the front trigger, with my sights in perfect alignment, something happened!

The "woodchuck" began to move. It moved right up into the air, first as a round dark object. It was followed by a pair of shoulders, and then to our utter dismay, terror and consternation, a man stood erect! The man wore a black slouch hat. He carried a rifle in his hand, and was apparently also out after woodchucks. He had been sitting on the ground at a point where there was a slight dropping off of the land as it sloped toward the creek, and had sat down in just such a position that the top of his old black hat stuck up over the top of the little knoll—and there we were—three crazy fools, four or five hundred yards away, trying to bore a hole through his skull!

Scared? Say, we were simply *paralyzed* with fright!

We immediately ducked down in the long grass, and the things we said to each other would not have looked nice in print! What if I had pressed *that* trigger and sent a bullet through his head? Of course I might have missed, just as the other boys had; but it doubtless would have been just my bull-headed luck to have made a center shot. We were as limp as dishrags, and mighty wet dishrags at that!

The man, after standing erect, looked all about. He didn't yell or say a word. Finally, after scanning the neighborhood pretty closely, he walked down to the next field where a farmer was cultivating beans. There they talked some little time, the farmer occasionally pointed in our direction. We knew thay had not seen us, but it stood to reason that they had both heard the "whine" of our bullets as they went ricocheting across the flats!

Did we remain where we were any longer? Reader, we did NOT!

It took us about two seconds to crawl back to the railroad track, and duck down behind a high embankment which ran along on the south side of the track. Bending low, we scooted ahead under cover of the high bank until we were a quarter of a mile away from the accursed spot!

Then we slipped down to the fence again, and I borrowed Charlie's telescope rifle, threw the gun across the rail and took a look back at the object of our fusillade, who was then toiling up the hill toward the spot where we had been shooting. Halfway up, he paused for a rest, and as he turned about

I got a good look at his face. I recognized the man at once as a prominent citizen of the town who resided in that section of the neighborhood, and who my chum and I knew as considerable of a sportsman.

I then crawled back to the boys, and we "went into a huddle." We were agreed on one thing—there would be no more shooting done by us for the balance of that day! But how could we get back to town without being spotted? Certainly not by the route we had started. We might bump into "our fellow townsman," and maybe get ourselves arrested.

Finally I suggested that we hike right along up the railroad track to the next town, six miles above. At that point another railroad entered the valley, crossing through our own town on the opposite side of the hills, and about two miles across from the other railroad. I advised that we walk back on the other railroad and separate before we got into town.

The Buffalo man was highly in favor of my plan—very much so! Had airplanes then been invented I think he would have hired one to convey him to Buffalo at top speed. He just didn't want to go back to town at all; said he could see no use of it. "This railroad here at Rock Glen runs to Buffalo," he commented, "and I see no use of my going back with you fellows."

But just then he happened to think that he had an unpaid board bill at the hotel, a grip and a couple of other guns, and he immediately made remarks not found in the New Testament or Webster's Unabridged!

It didn't take many minutes for us to leg it up the track until a convenient curve hid us from the view of anyone from the direction we had come. Then we slowed down to catch our breath. I then "razzed" the Buffalo man in no uncertain terms, asking him if his eyes were so darned poor that he could not tell a woodchuck from a man's hat with as powerful a telescope as his gun was fitted with. He didn't have much to say in reply, except that he "guessed he made a mistake for once in his life."

Arriving at the town above, we went into the depot for a drink of water and to "bathe our fevered brows." We then lost no time in taking the back track for home via the other railroad track. We loitered along so as to strike town about dark. Just before entering the village the Buffalo man took his gun apart, and hid the barrel down the leg of his trousers, and tied the stock under his coat out of sight. My chum and I could not do that with our long-barreled Ballards.

We then separated and sauntered in by different streets, without attracting any special attention. Arriving at the hotel, the Buffalo man consulted a timetable and found that he could catch a late train for Buffalo. He said his girl would be expecting him and he didn't want to disappoint her; but there was a sickly grin on his face as he said it. He asked us to drop him a letter in case there was any "aftermath."

Something popped the following morning. When I went to the postoffice for the mail, I overheard several men discussing the narrow escape of Jim Smith (that isn't his name!) from death at the hands of some "damn fool shooter." Quite a story came out in the village paper also, which wound up with, "Look out, boys! Constable Cornell is on the trail of that careless shooter."

For some mysterious reason, neither my chum nor I were questioned about it. The Buffalo man could never be prevailed upon again to "come out to my town for a little woodchuck shooting."

However, it was a life-lesson for the three of us; and I, for one, have never since trusted anyone else's eyes to tell me what I was shooting at. I had learned that it is a heap sight better to be "safe than sorry."

Well, heaven forbid that there should be any trigger-happy nimrods numbered among the sportsmen who read these pages. But a little reminder now and then can't do any harm. And Mr. Brininstool's illuminating article certainly carries a timely lesson for all of us who ever have occasion to handle firearms—and have seen what tragic consequences can result from their careless handling.—K.W.G.

(Continued from page 114)

However, if you are successful in finding a Derringer, the cartridges are another matter. I understand they are no longer being manufactured, and it's a case of finding a box on some dealer's stock shelf, if you are fortunate. I know I recently had to split my own box of .41 rimfire shorts for my Derringer, with the Sheriff here, as he wanted a few for his little barker, and none were to be found in stores.

Personally, though you did not ask this, I'd advise the purchase for a self-defense arm of close ranges, one of the Smith & Wesson "Terriers" or Colt Banker's Model .38. I like the old .38 S & W Hammerless New Departure best of all the pocket arms I ever had, but they are like the Derringers, no longer made, although fairly easy to find in pawnshops even today. But the two I first mentioned are standard arms, and not too bulky to pack, using modern ammo.

As to range, I have shot the Derringer .41 at twenty-five yards with sufficient accuracy to hit a teacup, using both barrels—but it lacked power, and I'd prefer the .38's any time or place for self-defense.

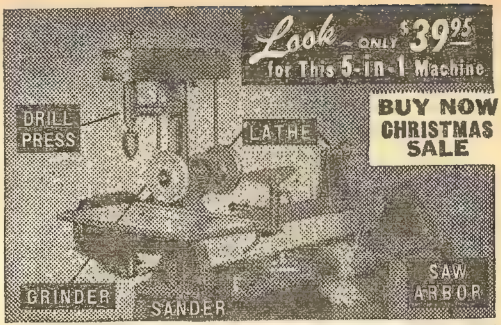
THE youngest state of the forty-eight.

Query:—I am thinking of going to Arizona next fall on a vacation, perhaps settling later. I have a bronchial trouble. What part of the state would you suggest? What are the winters like in the mountains and are summers very hot? Is water scarce? Is there any good fishing and where can I get fish and game laws? What is a javelina? Are the forests all softwood? Any information or where I can get it about places of interest, minerals, Indians, appreciated.

—Rollin S. Bryant
Little Valley, N. Y.

Reply by C. C. Anderson:—First, as to your bronchial trouble. I doubt if even the doctors can advise you which section of Arizona will prove beneficial for you. We have four climates here, from tropical and plenty hot (120 in the summer) but dry, to semi-arctic (as low as 30 below in winter) but still dry even with the heavy snows they have in the mountains. It is all caused by altitude, which you can check on a map.

The best way, and of course the most expensive one, is to live in one place a while and if it doesn't help you move to another. I don't want to discourage you but that is one thing you will have to worry about. If you choose Phoenix you may find that you should have gone to Flagstaff, for instance. So I'm unable to suggest which part of the state. Honestly, most of the doctors in the north where the mountains are, have moved there because of their own trouble that wasn't helped by the climate in the low areas such as Phoenix.



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I moved down here, for the second time, from Springerville which is right in the mountains. Not because of my own health but for business reasons. In the valley, here or with altitudes under 2500, you will find the summers plenty hot. It will climb right up to around 120 and stay that way for between two and three months. During June, July and August it doesn't even cool off at night. Therefore, all the homes, offices, hotels, etc., are artificially cooled. A few by refrigeration, or dry cold, but most by the evaporative method of blowing cool, moist air into the hot house. Now, that's one reason a lot of respiratory sufferers can't stay here, they can't stand humidity.

You will find altitudes on the map and so I can say that those around 3500 in Arizona are delightful, places such as Nogales, Bisbee, Morenci, and others. They don't get so hot in the summer and are far enough south so that it isn't too cold in the winter. Places like Flagstaff or Springerville, about 7500, drop as low as 30 below zero in the winter and have from four to ten feet of snow.

Yep, water is scarce, all over Arizona. Lack of water prohibits the growth of the state. You can't have any manufacturing or big centers unless you have water, and we don't have it, and can't get it. Only less than 5 per cent of the state can be irrigated and that limits farming.

There is pretty good fishing. This is the result of heroic efforts on the part of the game department in the rearing and constant planting of fish. There are many lakes in Arizona, usually they are reservoirs that impound the water for irrigation. There aren't so many actual miles of mountain streams that have trout but the ones we do have are good, as the trout are planted, legal size, every year and even several times during the season.

Address a letter to Arizona Game and Fish Department, State Capitol, Phoenix, and they will be able to send you a copy of the game laws.

A javelina is a wild pig, similar to the peccary. They weigh from 60 to 80 pounds and are lots of fun to hunt. I've never killed one. They seem to be native here, in parts of Mexico and on islands in the Pacific, off the west coast of Mexico and lower California. They must be killed with a rifle here, but are hunted with spears in other countries.

Yes, our forests are all of softwood. There is no native hardwood in Arizona.

The best source of information for some of the questions you have asked, as well as being interesting and covering the entire state, is a book published about 1939. It is *Arizona, a Guide to the State*, and is in the guide series of the entire country that was prepared under the WPA writers projects but published commercially. You'll get a kick out of it and find most of the answers, some place in the book.

THE END

(Continued from page 6)

I am 18 years old and have been trying for some time to locate my two uncles—without success. So I am turning to you for help. About all I know of them are their names and where they may be living. They are: Harry Aloysius Moore and Robert John Moore. They are most likely living in Chicago, Illinois or a suburb. Harry may be in the printing business. Please write to Arthur Wm. Ronnie, 4639 Maubert Ave., Los Angeles 27, Calif.

Marie Whitaker, 519 Second Avenue South, Great Falls, Montana is seeking her two sons, Thomas Dewey Whitaker, now 50 years old, and Sidney LeRoy Whitaker, 48 years old. Last heard from them about 1919.

Henry L. Durst, 2827 N. Cambridge, Chicago, Ill., would like to hear from Joe Bennett, Lt. Comdr., U.S.N.R., whom he met on the B.B. *Wisconsin* in 1947. Last heard from him from Port Arthur, Texas. He had lived in the Bronx, N. Y.

Anyone knowing whereabouts of Corp. McQuarry of Ashland, Me., formerly Co. C, 26th I. T. Bn., Camp Croft, please write Ed Stuart, Burgess Store, Va.

FINAL HOURS

(Continued from page 64)

into a grove of tall bushes. There was a whining, terrible splinter of wood.

He went spinning through wet, granular snow, ripped by naked branches. Warm, carmine trickles spurted from his chin.

His body whirled into a crumpled heap at the edge of a clearing. He lay there in agony, unable to breathe.

Then his breath came, in deep gasps. The sharp crack, he knew, had been at least one of his ribs. The blood roared in his ears, and he was crying in fierce pain.

But he was alive. *Alive!*

The wonder of it grew upon him as he lay there. He had flown off the Headwall, seeking death. Yet he had lived—because he had changed his mind and determined to live. As simple as that.

Determined to live . . .

When the ski patrol found him, David was half-frozen and delirious. Yet, feebly, he tried to fight them off when they lifted him gently onto the ski sled.

"I can walk to the hospital!" he insisted fiercely. "I don't need anybody's help. Not any more!"

THE END

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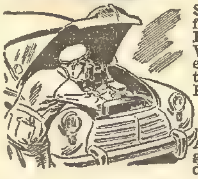

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(Continued from page 93)

again, I-can-do-it-again" as the three pistons rose and plunged in their lusty cycle had not developed. A sinister laboring quality in their slow and burdened beat spoke unmistakably of trouble. He watched the ship's head but could check no swing against the blank curtain of fog.

The compass showed a little movement, but not much. The lubber's line crept slowly across the degrees. The dread significance could not for long be lost to him. His heart quickened its beat. He knew the ship was touching the bottom.

"Give her a double ring ahead—and get a sounding!"

There was a chance that she might force round and come out again into deep water. With strained and anxious face the captain swung the telegraph handle twice through its full travel. The engines raised their thudding pace. The compass card was now scarcely moving. Long before the leadsman's yell of "Five less a half" came up from the chains, he knew the truth. They had been smelling the bottom for the past five minutes. Now they were touching, probably nudging through soft hillocks.

"Full astern! Shake her up!"

The engines stopped with confirming suddenness, then draggingly pounded astern. At the same moment the fog thinned out momentarily on the starboard bow and he caught a glimpse of something formless yet solid. Anxiously he watched the leadline. It would be the first thing to show any fore and aft movement. But the ship was now at a standstill. The line remained dismayingly plumb.

The *Halliburton Valley* was hard and fast aground.

Somewhere along the shore a maroon boomed to summon the lifeboat crew. "Ship on the Main!" would be echoing along the beach to send the Walmer boatmen crowding to their craft ready poised on the launching ways.

"What about lightening her, Pilot? We can pump some fuel oil overboard." The captain sounded desperate.

"No, Captain. The tide's falling too fast for that. Just let her lie. She'll take no harm just here. She'll float off again on the next tide."

To hell with Reddick and his filthy propositions, thought the pilot. I've put a ship ashore, I'll beat my blasted jinx and get her off again.

"You're sure you can get her off, Pilot?"

"Dead certain, Captain. And there'll be no damage, either. We're on level sand here."

The captain relaxed a little, then returned to the point with restless anxiety.

"What about tugs?"

"No use at all, Captain. The water's falling away all the time. Nothing will shift her until the tide makes again."

ALREADY the pebbly foreshore was beginning to show close on the starboard bow as the fog thinned patchily before the puffy breeze. In the low mist beyond the beach swam a leafy cloud of treetops in which seemed to float the steeple of a church. And Walmer Castle stood out clear and dismayingly close. He could now see where they were.

Stranded on the Main! Aground in twenty-six feet of water some four hundred yards from the mainland and a full two miles inside their dead reckoning position. So much for Trinity Bay and the South sand head.

How the devil had they come there? He checked rapidly back over the last thirty minutes. They'd had their exact position off the wreck buoy. The course had been set and checked on the standard compass.

Well, that would have to remain a mystery for the time being. There were more practical issues to handle.

Already the water had fallen another six inches. He ordered the engines stopped. Any prolongation of the astern movement was not only utterly futile but might pile up an obstructing sand bank under her stern.

"Well, Pilot, looks like we're stuck, doesn't it?"

The pilot pursed his lips, hunched his shoulders and seemed on the point of replying when a hail from over the water cut him short. He looked up to see the Walmer lifeboat coming out of the fog

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from the nor'ard. She looked very businesslike with her crowd of lifebelted, yellow oilskinned figures.

"Nice publicity this time," reflected the pilot, wryly.

Heaving to under the wing of the bridge, the coxswain shouted, "There's a couple of salvage craft anchored further up. We gave them a hail. They'll be along pretty soon. We'll stand by."

That would be Reddick's outfit. Even as he digested the fact, they loomed up out of the fog and closed with the stranded ship.

He noted grimly that there was no activity on deck. They'd been called a bare ten minutes ago, yet they had got under way, with all their heavy towing gear ready and everything prepared for a major salvage operation. It was obvious that Reddick had briefed them well in advance, that they had been lying in wait like vultures to feed on a promised carcass. There would be no squeamishness. They would batten on their prey without restraint. No regard for the pilot's reputation.

Well, he was done for anyway. A genuine stranding was no blot on his conscience, but it would have a disastrous effect on his livelihood. And now that fate had sneered at his honesty, what harm would there be in encouraging the captain to take assistance? It was only a matter of opinion anyway, and he might as well salvage something from the final wreck of his career by stringing along with Reddick. He had to carry the burden, it was about time he collected something from this malicious jinx that delighted so in shoving him around.

All the same, how the devil *had* they got ashore?

"Pilot . . ." A young voice husky with trepidation came from the lad at the wheel. "Pilot—what was our course just before you said 'hard a-port' to anchor?"

"Nor-nor-east, son."

"Good God! I—I was going nor-nor-west!" And it all came out with a rush—"After we'd gone hard over for that ship at anchor and you said course again—I only came back to nor-nor-west!"

From the look in the captain's eye it was plain that serious trouble was brewing for the young lad. But there came another interruption as the radioman held out a message to the captain.

He read it, then passed it to the pilot. One phrase in it slapped the pilot between the eyes: " . . . and take all available assistance . . ."

For a split second of blinding clarity all values stood out in stark relief. This young lad at the wheel with the guts to volunteer his error. He could have kept it to himself. But no—it was just another facet of John. And by God!—he wasn't going to throw all that into Reddick's melting pot. And no one, not Reddick, not the captain, not even the Owners were going to tell him how to do his job or assume one grain of his supreme responsibility.

One of the salvage craft was hailing the bridge. It was obvious that her operator had taken down the message also.

"Take our line—we're hooking up!"

The pilot shot out a restraining hand to the captain's arm and firmly relieved him of the megaphone.

"Stand off!" he bawled. "We don't want any assistance, thanks!"

The skipper of the nearer salvage craft gaped up in blank astonishment.

"B-but Reddick said . . ."

"NO ASSISTANCE!" roared the pilot.

On the two salvage craft heads went together urgently.

"You'll break your back where you are!"

"Not just here we won't. You can clear off as far as we're concerned."

He turned to the captain. "This is what we do. We take no assistance except our own seamen's savvy. Get two of your boats into the water. Hang your light kedge anchor off from one on a slip rope and coil down a good wire rope in the boat. Tow that lot away with the other boat and plant the kedge in deep water. Then it's all hell astern on the engines when the tide makes enough to lift us, and heave all you can on the kedge line. Four hours' flood and we'll fly off. No cost to the Owners, and all you'll lose will be some of the weed and barnacles that have been running up your fuel bills these past few months."

Lucky the weather was fine. In her last fling at him fate had bogged down on that

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point. It made possible the difficult boatwork, and certainly eased the strain of waiting, although it in no way diminished the enormous sense of relief when the ship finally slid off under her own efforts on the rising tide, exactly as the pilot had gambled.

THE Marine superintendent of the Valley Line received Captain Hughes in his inner sanctum.

"We asked you to come and see us personally, Pilot," he said. "There are matters we can't adequately deal with in a letter." He waved the pilot to a chair. "We carry our own insurance in this company, and you've performed a very valuable service for us. The *Halliburton Valley* and her cargo were both very important to us for obvious reasons, and we are more grateful than we can express for your nerve and skill in extricating our ship without assistance. As for the young fellow who caused it all..." The superintendent broke off and looked slightly confused. "Well, that young lad was my son. A good boy too. But your intervention on his behalf has made it easier for us to give him the second chance we would have given any other lad. We like to bring our own personnel along and keep them with us—we hope big things for our Line.

"As for your own boy, well, when a youngster comes to see us under his own steam and tells us he doesn't want to be put to sea sissy style, we can't help matching him with his father, and giving him an opening." The superintendent rose from his chair and moved toward an inner door, pausing with his hand on the knob. "Oh!—and before I take you in before the full Board I'll put you wise on what to expect. Old Gambody, our chairman, is going to say just what I've said, but in a grander manner. And you'll be offered the regular appointment as our coastal pilot. We have a good many ships round the coast all the time, enough to keep you busy, and we aren't always satisfied with some of the men we get, even though we are only tramping."

"Tramps!" said the pilot to himself. "Nothing wrong with tramps!"

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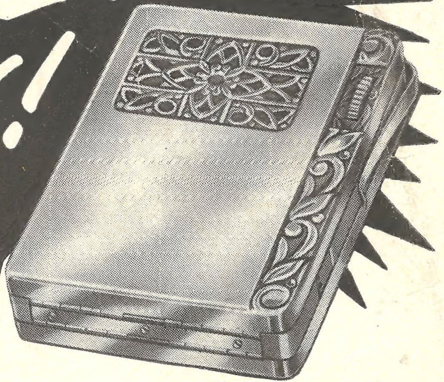

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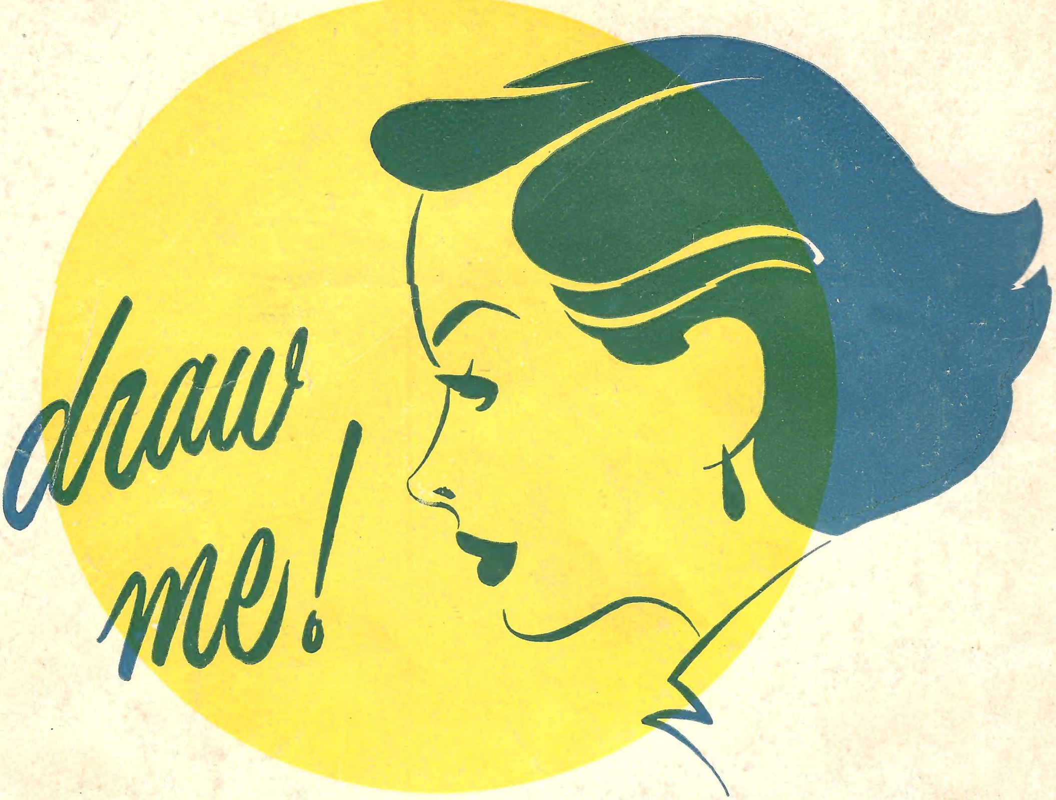

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